

**A library of our own:
the potential for a women's library
in Wales**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed

Date

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by citations and footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed

Date

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed

Date

ABSTRACT

Though there are approximately 400 women's libraries or information centres internationally they are not generally the focus of research within either library studies or feminist research.

This thesis addressed this gap in relation to women's libraries in the British Isles, focusing particularly on Wales where there is currently no physical women's library. The research analysed the nature of current women's libraries; examined their place within librarianship and feminist research and investigated whether there is potential for a women's library in Wales.

Interviews were held with staff at nine women's libraries or archive projects: Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales, Feminist Archive (South), Feminist Library, Glasgow Women's Library, Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre, Women's History Project, Women in Jazz, Women's Library, and the Women's Resource Centre.

The findings reveal three models of women's libraries: research-orientated institutions; community-based women's resource centres and online databases of material pertaining to women. A fourth model is developing in Wales: that of distributed donations of material in local record offices.

On the positive side, all the physical women's libraries have extensive and important collections, and they provide spaces for women's learning. Conversely, they are constrained by limited financial and human resources. They are not closely engaged with librarianship or with feminism; and librarianship and feminist research do not appear to be closely linked to them.

Given the resource implications of creating and maintaining a physical women's library in Wales, possible future developments include a mapping exercise of women's archives in Wales; raising awareness of the value of women's archives; and developing the work of Swansea Women's Centre to meet contemporary information needs of women.

Whilst these organisations contribute to the field of librarianship and archives there does not appear to be the potential to create a physical women's library in Wales along traditional lines.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMC/WAW	Archif Menywod Cymru/ Women's Archive of Wales
ANW	Archives Network Wales
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
CIPFA	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
CyMAL	Museums Archives and Libraries Wales
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
GWL	Glasgow Women's Library
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
IIAV	International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement
IT	Information technology
LAIC	Lesbian Archive and Information Centre
LMU	London Metropolitan University
MLA	Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
NLW	National Library of Wales
RSLP	Research Support Libraries Programme
RTWI	Round Table on Women's Issues
SLIC	Scottish Library and Information Council
SWC	Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Services
UN	United Nations
WHELF	Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum
WI	Women's Institute
WLM	Women's Liberation Movement
WRC	Women's Resource Centre (London)

Though there are approximately 400 women's libraries or information centres internationally they are not generally the focus of research within either library studies or feminist research. This thesis addressed this gap in relation to women's libraries in the British Isles, focusing particularly on Wales where there is currently no physical women's library. The research analysed the nature of current women's libraries; examined their place within librarianship and feminist research and investigated whether there is potential for a women's library in Wales. Interviews were held with staff at nine women's libraries or archive projects: Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales, Feminist Archive (South), Feminist Library, Glasgow Women's Library, Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre, Women's History Project, Women in Jazz, Women's Library, and the Women's Resource Centre. The findings reveal three models of women's libraries: research-orientated institutions; community-based women's resource centres and online databases of material pertaining to women. A fourth model is developing in Wales: that of distributed donations of material in local record offices. On the positive side, all the physical women's libraries have extensive and important collections, and they provide spaces for women's learning. Conversely, they are constrained by limited financial and human resources. They are not closely engaged with librarianship or with feminism; and librarianship and feminist research do not appear to be closely linked to them. Given the resource implications of creating and maintaining a physical women's library in Wales, possible future developments include a mapping exercise of women's archives in Wales; raising awareness of the value of women's archives; and developing the work of Swansea Women's Centre to meet contemporary information needs of women. Whilst these organisations contribute to the field of librarianship and archives there does not appear to be the potential to create a physical women's library in Wales along traditional lines.

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Appendix 1) List of women's libraries in the British Isles

(with location and year of foundation and brief reasons for not including them in the case study)

- *ABANTU for Development - Resource Centre* (London) (1997)
Specialist centre focusing on gender perspectives in development in Africa.
- *Equality Commission for Northern Ireland* (Belfast) (1976)
Broader remit than just women, to include racial, religious and disability discrimination.
- *Feminist Archive North* (University of Leeds) (1978)
Joint venture with Feminist Archive South, but does not have open accessible resource centre.
- *Lesbian Archive and Information Centre* (Glasgow) (1984)
Included within the Glasgow Women's Library case study as is housed within their building.
- *The Hypatia Trust* (Penzance, Cornwall) (1996)
Aim is to collect and make available published and personal documentation about the achievements of women. Collection currently housed in five buildings. At the time of consideration, was not fully developed for public access.
- *WiTEC UK - Women in Science, Engineering and Technology* (Sheffield Hallam University) (1988)
Specialist group in a network of organisations working towards increasing women's involvement in the Science, Engineering and Technology fields. Overly narrow focus for this thesis.
- *Women's Art Library* (London) (1982)
Specialist library on women artists. Closed October 2002. Collection moved to Goldsmiths' College, University of London as a closed archive.
- *Women's Health* (London) (1981)
Specialist library providing information and support on women's health issues. Overly narrow focus for this thesis.

Appendix 2) List of women's libraries visited or interviewed

(listed alphabetically)

- Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW)
- Feminist Archive (South) (Bristol)
- Feminist Library (London) (Closed Spring 2004)
- Glasgow Women's Library
- Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre.
- Women in Jazz (formerly Women's Jazz Archive, Swansea)
- Women's History Project (Ireland)
- Women's Library (London)
- Women's Resource Centre (London)

Appendix 3) Collection size of the sampled women's libraries

N/A – not applicable

N/K – not known

Library/Archive	Books	Journals	Manuscripts & archives	Misc.
Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW)	N/A –Range of collections donated, particularly strong on the peace movement and the women's liberation movement of the 1970s onwards.			
Feminist Archive (South) (Bristol)	600 fiction 1000 non-fiction	N/K	N/K	1500 items
Feminist Library (in 2004, when it closed)	10,000 books	1500	N/A	1200 articles 1750 pamphlets & ephemera
Glasgow Women's Library	c. 20,000 books and videos	Quantity not known	Several collections e.g. Edinburgh Women's Centre; Lesbian Archive and Information Centre;	Newspaper cuttings; photographs; posters; badges and other ephemera.
Swansea Women's Centre	3 bookcases of items			
Women in Jazz	Quantity not known	Quantity not known	Quantity not known	Performance gowns, records, music equipment, music scores; 1000s of records
Women's History Project (Ireland)	Surveyed over 400 repositories			
	<i>The Directory of Sources for the History of Women in Ireland</i> Covers 14,000 collections and sources and contains over 100,000 pieces of information from 262 repositories.			
	<i>Women in 20th-Century Ireland: Sources from the Department of the Taoiseach, 1922-1966</i> Just under 2,000 boxes of files were examined. Database contains just under 20,000 entries to references to women in the papers.			
Women's Library	60,000 books and pamphlets	2500 periodical titles	400+ archive collections; 1000s of ephemera items	5000 museum objects
Women's Resource Centre	4 shelves worth of books, reports and articles.			

Appendix 4) User numbers of sampled women's libraries

Library/Archive	User numbers
Archif Menywod Cymru/ Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW)	n/a
Feminist Archive (South)	No accurate record kept
Feminist Library	c. 10 a week (Ilett, 2003, p.288)
Glasgow Women's Library	c. 100 a week
Swansea Women's Centre	Not known
Women in Jazz	Not an archive that has regular users/visitors
Women's History Project (Ireland)	c. 1000 hits/week on website
Women's Library	c. 60 a week (Ilett, 2003, p.288) (in first year of re-opening, using Reading Room)
Women's Resource Centre	Less than one a week (as of 2003)

Appendix 5) Membership fees & membership figures of the sampled women's libraries

Library/Archive	Membership fees	Membership figures
Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW)	£5 students and unwaged £10 waged £25 organisations	130
Feminist Archive (South)	£10 pa	??
Feminist Library (in 2003- 04)	£5 - £25	95 (2000) (Ilett, 2003, p. 281)
Glasgow Women's Library	£8.50 low/unwaged £17.00 waged £25.00 Organisations/Groups	1800
Swansea Women's Centre	N/A	N/A
Women in Jazz	N/A	N/A
Women's History Project (Ireland)	N/A	N/A
Women's Library	£15 (Friends) £30 - £100 (Patrons)	??
Women's Resource Centre	£5 - orgs. with income under £10,000 pa £10 - orgs. with income of £10,001 - £50,000 pa £20 - orgs. with income £50,001 - £100,000 pa £30 - orgs. with income over £100,000 pa £8 - unwaged individual £15 - waged individual	100+

Appendix 6) – Relevant women's organisations in Wales (that have an element of information provision) & women's studies courses in Wales

BAWSO Black Association of Women Step Out	www.bawso.org.uk
Chwarae Teg/ Fair Play	www.chwaraeteg.com
Cynulliad Merched Cymru/ Wales Assembly of Women	02920 512 452
Honno Welsh Women's Press	www.honno.co.uk
Merched y Wawr	www.merchedywawr.com
Mewn Cymru	www.mewn-cymru.org.uk
Wales Women's National Coalition	www.wwnc.org.uk
Welsh Women's Aid	www.welshwomensaid.org
Women's Institute (Wales)	www.womens-institute.co.uk/wale.shtml
Women's Workshop, Cardiff Training Centre Ltd	www.womensworkshop.org.uk
WomenZone newsletter (run from Swansea Women's Centre)	(no website)

Women's Studies courses

MA in Gender & Culture (University of Wales, Swansea) (f/t and p/t)

MA Women's Studies (University of Wales, Bangor) (p/t)

Appendix 7) Collection Development Policy from The Women's Library

Extract from:

<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/thewomenslibrary/aboutthecollections/colldevpol.cfm>

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICY

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7. COPYRIGHT AND OWNERSHIP

8. DATE OF REVIEW

(continued...)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Women's Library is already the most comprehensive collection of women's history in the UK. The Library's mission is "to document and explore women's lives in Britain in the past, now and in the future, inspire learning and debate through the collections and related programmes, and to act as an international resource for women's history research". We aim to develop the collection into a national research resource documenting women's lives and the issues that concern them.

The Library's collections cover a variety of topics, including women's rights, suffrage, sexuality, health, education, employment, reproductive rights, the family and the home. The emphasis is primarily on women in Britain, but some international material is available, particularly the Commonwealth. The Library contains over 60,000 books and pamphlets, over 2,500 periodical titles, ephemera and press cuttings, over 400 personal and organisational articles and a Museum collection consisting of material objects, posters and photographs. Established in 1926 as the Library of the London Society for Women's Service, it also contains the Cavendish Bentinck collections, the Josephine Butler Society Library and the Sadd Brown Library. The Library was re-named the Fawcett Library in 1952 and subsequently The Women's Library in 2000.

The Women's Library is a registered charity (no. 312169) whose trustees are the members of the Board of Governors of London Metropolitan University. The Women's Library collection was formally transferred to the City of London Polytechnic in January 1979 and City of London Polytechnic later became London Guildhall University, which finally acquired ownership of the collection in Deeds of Gift from The Fawcett Society and the Josephine Butler Society in 1998.

The collections are held in trust by The Women's Library Trust Fund, the trustees of which are the Governors of London Metropolitan University. London Metropolitan University delegates responsibility for the collections to a Sub Committee of the Board of Governors: The Women's Library Council. A Collections Development Group, Chaired by a member of The Women's Library Council, is responsible for strategic development of the collections. The Library also operates an Acquisitions Board, which considers and makes decisions on all donations, acquisitions and disposals.

This policy was formerly approved by The Women's Library Council in June 2002.

Appendix 8) Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales Policy

Extract from: <http://www.womensarchivewales.org/>

ARCHIF MENYWOD CYMRU / WOMEN'S ARCHIVE OF WALES DEPOSIT SCHEME

A key objective of the Women's Archive of Wales is to identify, rescue and preserve materials relevant to women's lives, past, present and future. This is to be achieved through the active collecting of relevant records, and arranging for their deposit in an appropriate, recognised repository. The scheme here described, with the forms and terms of deposit attached, has been accepted by the organisations forming the Archives and Records Council Wales, which includes all local authority Record Offices.

The principle of the deposit scheme is that collections are offered to the Women's Archive of Wales, which directs them to an appropriate repository. The appropriate repository will be that with the closest links, geographically or thematically, with the creator of the collection. The choice of repository will be made in consultation with the owner of the records and the Women's Archive of Wales advisers and the repository concerned.

The physical transfer of collections can be directly between the owner and the agreed repository, or via the Women's Archive of Wales Management Board, as appropriate. The collections will be administered by the repository, which will acknowledge receipt, and hold the collection under the title of Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales. Thus a virtual collection will be established, physically dispersed, but held under the name of Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales and accessioned by the Women's Archive of Wales for their records.

The Women's Archive of Wales (the Depositor) will:

- Discuss offered deposits with the Management Board and the appropriate repository.
- Issue letter of acknowledgement and Terms of Deposit to the Donor, who will sign and return the attached slip.
- Arrange deposits of collections into agreed repositories.
- Receive acknowledgement of deposit, and lists of the collection when completed.
- Write to thank the donor and inform her/him of the Repository's reference number assigned to the collection.
- Administer an accessions register, and report deposits to the Women's Archive of Wales membership.

The Repository will:

- Acknowledge receipt of the collection to the Depositor and the Donor.
- Accession collections received through the Women's Archive of Wales as part of the Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales collection.

(continued...)

- Issue a copy of the detailed record of the collection, listing all items, to the Women's Archive of Wales. Copies of this record to be available to researchers at the repository's search room and to the National Register of Archives, and placed on the repository's database and/or the Archives Network Wales.

The Original Owner (Donor) will:

- Receive a copy of the Women's Archive of Wales Collecting Policy and Terms of Deposit, and advice as to how to deposit the material.
- Deliver, or otherwise pass, the material to the repository.
- Receive acknowledgement of receipt of the collection, including the Repository's reference number assigned to the collection.

June 2005.

ARCHIF MENYWOD CYMRU / WOMEN'S ARCHIVE OF WALES COLLECTING POLICY

The Women's Archive of Wales aims to identify, rescue and preserve materials relevant to women's lives, past, present and future, and to make this resource available to present and future generations. We will do this through exhibitions, publications and education, however collecting is our core activity.

The Archive collects diaries, letters, minute books, accounts, newsletters, photographs, and many other items which illustrate our past. We will consider any items which represent the lives, activities or experiences of women who live or lived, or are connected with Wales.

The Archive does not have a building to house its collection. Instead we have been able to make a very appropriate arrangement which takes advantage of existing facilities throughout Wales, and will make the collection accessible through a website.

The County Record Offices of Wales and all members of the Archives Council of Wales have agreed to hold material for us on deposit, as a separate Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales collection. Acceptance of material will be decided according to the Collecting Policies of the individual repositories. While this material is given the same professional care and management as all other collections held in these repositories, and is available to researchers in the same way, it will remain a distinct Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales collection.

The Women's Archive of Wales abides by the National Archives and Records Policy of Wales, produced by the Archive Council of Wales in 2001, which provides a set of principles for the management of archive collections. This Policy has a presumption of open access to the collections, but reasonable restrictions are respected where appropriate.

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Appendix 9) Interview schedule – sample

Women's libraries- broad interview schedule

History & setting

- Q. 1. When was the library established?
- Q. 2. What are its roles and purposes? Aims? Have these changed over time?
- Q. 3. How is the library funded?
- Q. 4. How is the library managed? e.g. management structure

Services

- Q. 5. How many staff are there? In what capacity i.e. paid, unpaid, ft, pt.
- Q. 6. What facilities and services does the library currently offer?
- Q. 7. Which service/facility is the most used?
- Q. 8. Why do you think this is so?
- Q. 9. Which service/facility is the least used?
- Q. 10. Why do you think this is so?
- Q. 11. What are the most common enquiries?
- Q. 12. Can you describe a typical visitor to your library?
- Q. 13. Do you offer any services electronically 'off-site' e.g. accessed through a webpage?
- Q. 14. Do you envisage there being a need to develop this type of service in the future?
- Q. 15. How is your website maintained? i.e. who does it?

Women's libraries – general

- Q. 16. What do you think of the concept of women-only spaces/collections?
- Q. 17. Can you name any women's libraries in Great Britain?
- Q. 18. Do you think there should be more women's libraries in Great Britain?
- Q. 19. Do you think that there should be a women's library in each of the three countries of Great Britain i.e. England, Scotland and Wales?

[if a primarily archival or historical library ask:]

Q. 20. Can you see a role for women's libraries beyond the 'archival' or historical research role?

Q. 21. Do you think women's libraries need to be physical buildings or could they exist virtually, as a collection of resources electronically i.e. a website?

Women's libraries – Wales

Q. 22. How do you see your centre within the network of women's archives/women's libraries?

Q. 23. Are you/or your centre involved with other local women's groups or networks?

Q. 24. Do you think there should be a women's library or women's archive in Wales?
Are you familiar with the work of AMC/WAW? What do you think of their set up?
Do you think women in Wales would benefit from a physical or virtual collection of resources specifically aimed at women?

Q. 25. If there was a physical building designated as a women's archive or women's resource centre in Wales, where should it be? Would you wish to see your collection as part of that?

Appendix 10) Ethics and consent form for participants

Research information & informed consent form

Project title: Women's libraries – is there a need for a women's information centre in Wales?

Name of Researcher: Alyson Tyler

Institution: Department of Information Studies, Llanbadarn Fawr Campus, University of Aberystwyth, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY23 3AS

Contact details:

Tel: 01970 622161 or leave a message on 01970 622188

Email: aet98@aber.ac.uk

What's it about?

You are being asked to take part in a study that is looking at women's libraries. I am looking at the role of women's information centres in helping women find information, and the role these types of places play in documenting women's lives and being a record of women's experiences over time.

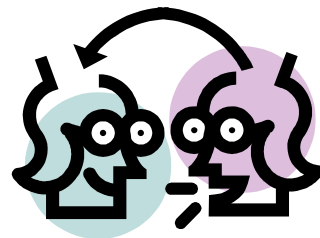
Why am I doing the study?

I am doing research for my PhD in Information Studies at Aberystwyth University. I am interested in women's information centres, also called women's libraries. There are about 10 women's libraries in Britain, and over 350 across the world. At the moment there are women's libraries in England and Scotland, but none in Wales. I am interested to find out what you think about whether a women's library would be useful to have in Wales.

What's involved?

I would like to interview you to find out what you think about women's information centres, and to ask questions about women's libraries.

I would like to record the interview. This means I can type up what you say word for word and it is more accurate than writing what you say as I may not be able to write fast enough. Your words will be both anonymous and confidential.



How will your opinions help me?

I will be using the opinions of the women I interview to help me understand what women think about these issues. I may also use quotes from what you and the other interviewees say in my written report.

Why do you have to sign a form?

It is good practice when interviewing people for research to make sure that they understand what's involved in taking part, and so that they know what will happen to the information that they provide. There is no obligation on you to take part however.

Informed consent form

By signing this form I am agreeing to take part in a study that is looking at women's libraries.

I understand that I will be asked to answer questions about women's libraries, particularly the place where I work.

I understand that taking part is voluntary and I can withdraw at any point.

I understand that it involves one interview which will take about 15-30 minutes.

I understand that the interview will be recorded, but that if I do not wish to be recorded I can say so before the interview begins and that the interviewer will write down my responses instead.

I understand that everything I say will be kept private (confidential) and that only the researcher (Alyson Tyler) will see a copy of my words, and possibly her two supervisors (Dr Geraint Evans & Dr Anoush Simon).

I understand that my words will be anonymous and that in the written report the researcher (Alyson Tyler) will not identify me. I understand that only the researcher herself will be able to link my words with my real identity.



Signature

Name

Date



Please keep a copy of this letter for yourself and return a copy to me

If you have any questions about the research, please contact me. My details are on the other sheet.

✂-----

-✂

As a thank you for your time, I am putting the name of everyone who takes part into a prize drawer to win some vouchers. If you wish to be in the drawer, please fill in your name and address here. Once the drawer has been made and the winner has been sent the vouchers, I will destroy these slips of paper so will not be keeping your address on file.

Name

Address.....

.....

.....

Further clarification of research ethics

[not given to the interviewees but used to answer further questions should they arise]

1. Anonymity

I will insure anonymity throughout my research by assigning a pseudonym to each woman that I interview. No pseudonym will be used if it is the name of another woman in the study. Only I shall have access to the file that links the real person with their pseudonym. No one reading the final written thesis will be able to link a quote to any real person.

2. Confidentiality

I will insure confidentiality by not showing anyone else the transcripts of the recorded interviews. Once the project is over, the tapes will be wiped. The transcripts will exist as paper copies, and as computer files. In line with University guidance, these files will be destroyed after five years. Nobody other than the researcher herself will access the paper or computer files.

3. Use of the data given

The content of transcripts will be used for the stated PhD research. From this, a thesis will be written and a copy will be available in the University of Wales Aberystwyth library. It will also be available to other researchers to read through Inter Library Loan.

It is hoped that articles in academic journals will also be written, based on this PhD research. Therefore, there may be an international readership.

It is also expected that a summary version of the thesis will be presented to the institutions that have helped with the research i.e. the women's libraries and other information centres that I visited.

4. Number and type of subjects involved

Staff at a range of women's libraries and other information centres will be interviewed. No one under the age of 18 will be interviewed.

5. Risks involved

There are no expected risks to the interviewer or the interviewees in taking part in the research. The women being interviewed give about 30 minutes of their time, and their opinions regarding the questions asked.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Women want easier access to information generally. (Women and Equality Unit, 2001, p. 19)

1.1 Introduction

The notion of women's libraries¹ is a complex one: what are they, why do they exist and who are they for? Though there are approximately 400 women's libraries and information centres internationally (International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement, 2005, n. p.) there is very little literature and discussion about them, either within library studies or feminist research. In part this may be connected to their diverse nature, crossing several sectors. For example, they could be considered within the spatial concept of 'a room of one's own'. Although Virginia Woolf envisaged a smaller, more personal space for writing and personal development than a women's library (Woolf, 1928), the notion of women-only space was an issue of particular concern during the second wave of feminism (c. late 1960s-mid 1980s) during which period many women's libraries were founded. Women's libraries could also be considered in relation to the library sector as an extension of the concept of 'special' libraries. There is also scope for studying women's libraries from within the field of women's information needs² as they contain diverse collections of material that might meet a range of these needs. In addition, as many of the women's libraries also contain extensive archives and ephemera, they could also be analysed from an archival perspective.

Women's libraries represent a different way of looking at information collection, dissemination and preservation. They use the additional criterion of sex to determine the focus of their collections. It has been noted that libraries and librarians play important roles in the access to information – they can be seen as 'gatekeepers'

¹ Throughout this thesis the term 'women's libraries' is used. It is taken to include women's resource centres and women's archive projects. For definition purposes a women's resource centre usually has broader functions and services, offering facilities not commonly associated with libraries such as counselling, training, health sessions etc. They may also be a 'centre' for other uses (Edwards & Fisher, 2002, p. xi)

(Kramarae & Spender, 1992, p. 232). Women's libraries, with their different perspectives, act therefore, as counter gatekeepers and preservers of women's history.

Despite the varied approaches to the notion of women's libraries, there does not appear to be significant mainstream or specialist consideration of women's libraries, either nationally or internationally, from any of these different viewpoints. Are women's libraries, which collect and disseminate information about, by and for women, effective in improving women's access to information?

1.2 Aims & objectives

This thesis addressed this gap in relation to women's libraries in the British Isles³. It looked at existing organisations and explored the situation in Wales where there is, at time of writing, no physical⁴ women's library. The interest in the research topic arose following developments at two existing women's libraries: a proposal from Glasgow Women's Library to be Women's Library of Scotland (Patrick, 2000, p. 15), and the re-naming and re-positioning of the Fawcett Library in London to become the National Library for Women (Library Association, 1998, p. 341; Purvis, 1998, n. p.)⁵. The implications of these shifts could suggest that Wales may wish to develop its own collection of material so as to offer a commensurate service to women in Wales. This is especially so after the process of political devolution of central British Government powers in the late 1990s, which increased political and legal autonomy in both Scotland and Wales. As constituent countries of Great Britain, there are broadly similar policies e.g. regarding health, education, law and

² Information needs are the needs of an individual to make a decision or answer a question (Davies & Bath, 2002, p. 303). A woman's information needs could cover things such as equal opportunities information, health information or educational information.

³ Geographically and politically Great Britain equates to England, Scotland and Wales; the United Kingdom is England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, its official name being the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; the British Isles is England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and other small islands e.g. Guernsey, Isle of Man (The Minster Guide to English Usage, 1979, p. 297; Chambers, 1998, p. 703 & p. 1829). This research includes a project based in the Republic of Ireland, thus the term British Isles is used throughout.

⁴ The term 'physical women's library' is taken to mean a collection of material that is available in one building.

order across England, Scotland and Wales. Broadly similar provision for specialist library services between these three countries could therefore be expected. Thus the ambitions of women's libraries in both England and Scotland to become 'national' institutions has political implications; this is especially so given the successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid by the Women's Library in London for £4.2 million, from a national i.e. UK-wide source. As a result of this high profile redevelopment of the Women's Library, the provision of women's information, archives and libraries in Wales needs attention.

The central aim and research question of the thesis is thus:

- Is there potential for a women's library in Wales?

Specifically, the objectives were to investigate:

- What are the roles and nature of current women's libraries in the British Isles?
- What is the place of women's libraries within librarianship?
- What is the place of women's libraries within feminism?
- What models of women's libraries exist, and which, if any, could be applicable to Wales?

1.3 Rationale for the study

There has been an amazing and widespread growth in the interest shown in women's lives in times past and this has been accompanied by a great demand for information... . (Beddoe, 1993, p. vii)

The issue of and demand for, provision of information to women has important international, social and economic dimensions. Women's information needs can affect the whole family unit and require particular attention. The United Nations (UN) believes that disseminating information to the women in a household is most effective in achieving their desired development aims (United Nations, 2000, p. xiv;

⁵ Although it was subsequently re-named the Women's Library, see Section 3.10.

Wang, 1999, p. 2) as information ‘trickles down’ via the women to the rest of the family members. In many less developed countries where the UN operates development programmes, dissemination of important information to women is often achieved via women’s resource centres, particularly in rural areas, or via specific radio programmes targeted at women (Corral & Ransom, 2001). Whilst the women’s libraries in the British Isles do not necessarily fall into the category of world development, they are part of an international network that is concerned with how women access information, how information about women is collated, stored and disseminated, and also the preservation of documents that record and reveal information about women’s lives in the past. Women’s libraries therefore have a central role to play in the library and archive professions, as well as within broader women’s networks for social and economic development.

Given their diverse backgrounds, connections and the rise in awareness of women’s issues over the last four decades, it is understandable how “[t]here has been a mushrooming of women’s information/documentation centres worldwide in the last two decades” (Vyas, 1993, p. 151). This has partly come from the rise in the quantity and nature of the information produced by the women’s movement of the late 1960s onwards. Kramarae & Spender note that women’s publishers were central in communicating the messages of the women’s movement and contributed to the resulting “knowledge explosion” (Kramarae & Spender, 1992, p. 17). The output of formal and informal women’s groups and women’s publishers needed a sympathetic home, and women’s libraries were therefore essential in providing an appropriate space for such material.

This increase in information coincided with worldwide recognition of women’s rights. Since the International Year for Women in 1975, the UN Decade for Women 1975-1985 and four UN World Conferences on Women⁶ (Mexico City 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995) there has been an enormous increase in the number and types of women’s organisations and networks around the

world, in conjunction with a recognition that women's issues are important. This has led to a rise in the need for comprehensive and reliable data on women and their concerns (Valk, Van Dam & Cummings, 1999, p. 26) culminating in the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* that affirmed that women's rights were human rights, and a determination to "advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity" (United Nations, 1995, p. 1). The UN saw collecting and creating disaggregated gender data as one way of achieving such equality. Vyas argues that mainstream libraries were unable to cope with the increase in this new area of information and thus women's organisations, resource centres and libraries were established to fulfil this need (Vyas, 1993, p. 151). Yet despite this rise in women's information centres, Vyas asks:

why is it that a common feeling expressed at all women's studies forums is that there is a lack of information? Is it the lack of information itself or of access to it, or both? Is there a lack of dialogue between those who want information and those who provide and handle information? Are our present information sources and services inadequate? Have we also been elitist in our approach to information and left out a majority of the users – the women at the grassroots level – unserved? (Vyas, 1993, p. 154)

Taking Vyas' concerns, it is pertinent to consider whether separate women's libraries are able to overcome this perception of lack of information. Do they disseminate information more effectively than other libraries? Do they reach a diverse range of women or is there a lack of dialogue between the information seekers and information disseminators? How exactly do they meet the variety of women's information needs? These questions will be addressed in the literature review (Chapter 2) and in the results chapters (Chapters 4 & 5).

1.4 The emergence and history of women's libraries

Women have collected, disseminated and exchanged knowledge and information since the beginning of history but it is only in this century that

⁶ Various pressure groups are currently campaigning for a fifth UN World Conference on Women, but the UN has so far said they have no plans to hold another conference (Millionth Circle Initiative,

centres have been set up for the specific purpose of collecting and documenting what has come to be known as women's information. (Valk, Van Dam & Cummings, 1999, p. 27)

The emergence of new thinking around women's issues in the 1960s and early 1970s gave rise to alternative sources of information. Feminist activists started to employ the use of alternative forms of communication, such as magazines, pamphlets, performances, audiovisual, puppetry shows, radio, dance, books, comic strips, street theatre, video and slides. These various forms of alternative media were used to inform and educate each other, and to create links between feminists in different parts of a country, and eventually regions and globally (George, 2003, p. 2).

Women have been collectors of books and communicators of information for centuries, and several texts examine the history of the private collections of particular women (e.g. Legaré, 1996). Women's libraries that are open to the public have a more recent history, with the oldest of these dating from the turn of the twentieth century e.g. The Library of the London and National Society for Women's Service, 1926 (now the Women's Library); the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris, 1931; and the International Archives for the Women's Movement (IAV), Amsterdam, 1935 (now the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement –IIAV). Both the Paris and Dutch libraries were founded on the basis of personal libraries of women who had played significant roles in their contemporary women's movements. Similarly, the London library was founded on the basis of collections of the former London Society for Women's Suffrage. In America, women's libraries and archives were founded in the 1940s after several campaigns to create a women's history archive (Hildenbrand, 1986b, p. 3; Moseley, 1973, p. 218).

Kramer locates the development of women's libraries and archives in Europe within three chronological phases: the early movement, often connected to suffrage

2005, n. p.)

campaigns or private collections of prominent feminists; the second wave of women's liberation (c. late 1960s – mid 1980s) which saw a rapid rise in the production of information for, about and by women; and a third phase of 'state feminism' from the 1980s onwards where centres were founded with government or agency backing, often connected to policy, equity and development initiatives (Kramer, 1993, p. 213; Jensen & Nielsen, 1995, p 97-98; Davaz-Mardin, 2000, pp. 448-449). Kramer notes that at the time of her survey which led to her chronological categorisation, the first generation women's libraries were often professionally run, sometimes publicly funded and with large collections. In contrast, the libraries from the second wave were short of funding, reliant upon volunteers, and often had a subject focus or specialisation. Third generation libraries, often set up by public bodies and national organisations for equity reasons in the 1980s, were frequently "planned, professional, and computerised" (Kramer, 1993, p. 213.) From the descriptions of the women's libraries visited for this thesis (see Section 3.10 in Chapter 3), we can see that Kramer's descriptions of the libraries' characteristics are still applicable over ten years later.

The international women's movement over the last 40 years, combined with an increased awareness of women's information as an internationally relevant issue, and the growing number of women's libraries and women's resource centres around the world has led to a recognition of information services for and about women (Wahhab, 1980, p. 13). This attention can be seen in the development in the 1990s of global conferences on women's libraries, formalising and raising the profile of this discipline.

In October 1991 the *First International Symposium of Women's Libraries* was held and hosted by the Women's Library in Turkey. The conference was attended by a "small group of European and American women library professionals" along with women from the Turkish women's library (Greening, 2000, p. 467). Having just been established, the staff were keen to develop links with, and enhance their knowledge of, other existing women's libraries.

The Turkish symposium inspired the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Radcliffe College, Boston, Massachusetts, USA to offer to host a subsequent conference. The conference *Women, Information and the Future: collecting and sharing resources world-wide* was held in 1994, attended by women from over 50 different countries (Karelse & Radloff, 1995b, p. 49). This conference aimed to “share ideas about documenting and networking women’s experiences internationally” and to “build closer communication and co-operation to improve women’s access to information” (Karelse & Radloff, 1995b, p. 49). Since then, subsequent international conferences have been held in the Netherlands in 1998 – the *Know How Conference on the World of Women’s Information* which was attended by 300 women from 83 countries (Vriend, 2001, n. p.) – and in Uganda in 2002 which was attended by 263 delegates from 48 countries (Know How Conference, n .d. p. 8). The next conference will be held in Mexico in 2006 on the theme: ‘*Weaving the information society: a gender and multicultural perspective*’. Its objectives are:

- To establish strategies that will promote the use of women’s information to improve women’s lives.
- To develop a strategic plan aimed at narrowing the information/digital gap for women.
- To share strategies that address the accessibility and availability of information for indigenous, excluded and rural women.
- To found a Latin American Network of Information Centers and Libraries on Women’s and Gender Studies (from mailing list KNOWHOWCONF@NIC.SURFNET.NL, Nov 19, 2005)

Since 1998, the IIAV have helped support and organise the conferences. The 1998 conference was able to turn some of the issues arising from the Fourth World Conference on Women into reality.

“[E]very country that endorsed the Platform for Action [at the 4th World Conference] had agreed, in doing so, to support, consult, and provide women-specific information.” (Vriend, 2001, n. p.)

Women's libraries and information centres were thus well placed to capitalise on this gendered-perspective for information and to look for international approval for their aims and objectives.

The 1998 conference was particularly influential as the organisers had begun collecting material for a directory of women's libraries. The resulting *Mapping the World* database was presented at the conference and has subsequently grown significantly in size, scope and format and is now available as a book, a free searchable online database and it was planned to release it on CD-ROM⁷ (Vriend, 2001, n. p.). The IIAV regards the database not only as useful for women's organisations and libraries but also as a useful tool for the media, policy makers and researchers (Vriend, 2001, n. p.). Indeed, it proved to be an essential research tool for this PhD research (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6.1).

The conferences as a whole have enabled practitioners in the field of women's information to share their ideas and expertise and also to develop useful connections.

1.5 Types of women's libraries

Given the chronological phasing and different reasons for the establishment of women's libraries, it is possible to outline different 'types' of women's libraries. Dickel outlines three reasons for the establishment of women's libraries in Germany (Dickel, 1995, p. 114). Vyas identifies three types of women's information centres in India (Vyas, 1995, p. 75) whilst Cummings, Valk & Van Dam identify six types of women's centres that can be applied identified internationally (Cummings, Valk & Van Dam, 1999, p. 23). Based on these classifications, I have identified the classification of women's libraries in Britain within the following three categories:

- (a) collections connected to women's organisations e.g. Women's Institute, Women's Aid

⁷ The CD version does not yet appear to be available. See IIAV website.

- (b) special collections, particularly of archives, in academic institutions e.g. where women's studies courses exist, or material in the British Library
- (c) women's centres, libraries and archives whose sole remit is to collect and disseminate information for and about women e.g. Feminist Archive (South) or Glasgow Women's Library

This thesis is interested in centres that fall into this last category as they are open to the public, operate along library principles, are separate physical units rather than collections within institutions that have other interests, and their prime concerns are to collect and provide information on a range of women's issues. In addition, the emphasis of these women's libraries or centres is not just on their collections, but on their significance as separate women's libraries or archive institutions. Despite focusing on just one category of women's libraries, the thesis reveals the existence of three different models of women's libraries in the British Isles within this one type (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6.).

As is evident from the literature review (Chapter 2), there is a dearth of research on any of the three variants of women's libraries outlined above. These organisations, whilst necessary (one assumes) to researchers of women's history and women's studies, have not become the focus of research in themselves. Likewise, whilst they emulate other libraries and archives in their services and collections, they are not the focus of a body of literature, certainly not critical or evaluative research. In terms of the British Isles, there is no comparative study of the various women's libraries in existence; this creates potential for this thesis, in examining the potential for the development of a women's library in Wales, and for placing it within the broader context of women's libraries in the British Isles.

1.6 The situation for women in Wales

It has been argued that "Welsh women are culturally invisible" (Beddoe, 1986, p. 227) even though they form the majority of the population in Wales (National Assembly for Wales, 2005, n. p.). It is also argued that women in Britain are socially

and economically disadvantaged (Equal Opportunities Commission 2003; Welsh Office 1998). The following statistics reveal the situation for women in Wales. (The data are from the *Introduction* section of *Statistical Focus on Wales: Women* (1998) unless otherwise indicated.)

- A much higher proportion of women than men are in households of 1 adult with dependent children.
- More than 3 out of every 5 carers are women.
- Nearly 1/3 of women in Wales have no formal qualifications compared with less than 1/4 of men.
- Women account for 85% of people in part-time employment (p. 21).
- 49% of women in employment work part-time. In comparison only 8% of men in employment work part-time (p. 31).
- 53% of women working full-time earn less than £250 per week compared to 29% of men (p. 42).
- Female employees earn on average 13% less than the average male f/t employee (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003, p. 1).
- In only 1 in 12 couples where both partners work full-time does the woman earn significantly more than the man (p. 42).
- On average, a lower proportion of women's income is derived from wages and salaries, compared with men, and a higher proportion from social security benefits (p. 42).

But, on the other hand,

- Women tend to have healthier lifestyles than men.
- Average life expectancy for females is 5 years longer than for males.
- Females are much less likely than males to commit crime.
- Girls tend to perform better in school examinations than boys (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003, p. 1).
- Women form the majority of full-time students in higher education and are more likely than men to participate in further education.

- in 1996, 63% of women of working age in Wales were in employment, 33% were economically inactive (i.e. not seeking work) and 4% were unemployed (p. 30).
- Political representatives in the National Assembly for Wales are equally split between 50% men and 50% women, the only government in the world to have achieved parity of the sexes.

Access to information is determined by social and economic conditions such as education, costs, transport, occupation etc (Women of Europe, 1996, p. 21). Given the economic and social differences highlighted in the above statistics, might women in Wales face inequality in terms of information access and provision and could a women's library in Wales overcome such inequality? The UN has acknowledged the value of targeting information services directly to women in order to improve their social, economic and cultural lives (United Nations, 1995, n. p.). Would this targeting, in the format of a women's library, be relevant in Wales? Do women's libraries offer a beneficial model for disseminating information to, and preserving information about, women?

1.7 Methods

In order to establish whether a women's library would be appropriate or possible in Wales, it is necessary to examine the current situation in the rest of the British Isles. The *Mapping the World* online database (on the IIAV website) presented the researcher with a list of 11 women's libraries and information centres in the UK⁸. The most general and all-encompassing centres were selected for interviews and visits. (See Chapter 3 for a full discussion on the selection process.) They were (in alphabetical order):

- Feminist Archive (South) (Bristol)
- Feminist Library (London)
- Glasgow Women's Library

⁸ The initial list of 11 was correct as of Autumn 2002. In Autumn 2005, the *Mapping the World* database contained a list of 13 such organisations for the UK.

- Women's Library (London)
- Women's Resource Centre (London)

In addition to these visits, a telephone interview was conducted with the Director of the Women's History Project, which is an online database of women's archives in Ireland. The findings from this phase of the fieldwork revealed a tri-model situation of women's libraries:

- archive-based research institutions
- socially-orientated community-based resource centres
- virtual archive collections

In Wales there is no women's library that fits the description of a publicly accessible collection of material collated specifically for and about women, as identified in Section 1.5. Instead, there are various organisations working in the different fields of women's information, archives and contemporary needs. Thus interviews were conducted with these key stakeholders who are:

- Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW)
- Women in Jazz (formerly Women's Jazz Archive, Swansea)
- Swansea Women's Centre (which is the only remaining women's centre in Wales) (Rolph, 2001, p. 91).

In total, eight site visits were made across the UK, 14 women were interviewed with a total of 12 interviews, 11 of which were recorded and fully transcribed. Extensive field notes were made during the site visits and were enhanced with reference to the existing literature (see Section 1.9). It should be established at this point that the aim of this thesis was *not* to conduct a comprehensive survey of women's libraries in the British Isles, but rather to use evidence from a range of the current women's libraries in the British Isles to inform a position as to what would be appropriate for Wales. The women's libraries that were surveyed can be seen as different models, and each model was considered in terms of its suitability or adaptability to Wales (see Chapter 6). Key themes that were considered during the analysis included: identity,

structures, communities, physical space, engagement with librarianship and engagement with feminism.

1.8 Theoretical perspective of the thesis

Feminist theories use gender as a prism through which to examine the social, political and economic world in the same way that Marxists use class as a prism (Farganis, 1994, p. 8). For this thesis, a feminist perspective determined the subject matter, epistemology and ontology. It is necessary to remember that:

[f]eminism is not a static or fully articulated doctrine. It is an evolving, self-critical theoretical and activist enterprise which has changed radically. (Code, 1995, p. xiii)

There are different approaches to feminism and multiple feminist epistemologies. Harding argues that there are three key methods of research: listening to people, observing, and examining evidence or documents. Feminists use all three methods, as do other researchers. The difference lies in how the methods are carried out (Harding, 1987b, p. 2). The deployment of feminist epistemologies influences the research questions, data collection methods and processes of analysis and interpretation of the findings. It can also affect the representation of results e.g. how the results are communicated and to whom (Cope, 2002, pp. 49-52). A feminist approach may also seek to give something back to participants - for example, I devised a prize draw for participants as a thank-you for their time. Summary findings from the thesis will be presented to the contributing institutions and women. It is also hoped that summary findings will be presented in a range of journals, including newsletters of the women's libraries and other related organisations, thus widening the traditional audience of an academic thesis.

Feminism can also be considered to illuminate previously invisible issues and can alter not only what is looked at but also the way of looking at an issue (Farganis, 1994, p. 9). By approaching women's libraries from the angle of librarianship, this thesis has a feminist perspective in that it is investigating something that has traditionally been relatively invisible (women's libraries) from a new perspective.

A full account of the research theories and methods is given in Chapter 3.

1.9 Existing research

Although women's libraries have diverse backgrounds and are applicable to many disciplines, there is a paucity of material on women's libraries, nationally and internationally. When searching using key terms such as 'women' and 'libraries', the majority of the material falls into the categories of female librarians, the feminisation of the profession, status and stereotypes. Although these are important areas, they do not cover the issue of women's libraries themselves. In addition, there is a reasonably large amount of literature on women's information needs. This literature is international in context and diverse in scope. It is an important sub-component of the research into women's libraries because the women's libraries operate in ways akin to public or academic libraries and seek to meet the information needs of their community. However, much of this literature on women's information needs concludes that women in general do not use libraries in order to find information; little attention is given within this literature to the position of women's libraries themselves in respect of meeting women's information needs.

The literature on women's libraries and women's resource centres has three main characteristics. It primarily consists of histories of various women's libraries across the world. These descriptive narrative accounts are interesting for the level of detail they provide and the broad context they present, but they lack theoretical and critical analysis and there is also a lack of comparative studies. Few of the papers discuss in any depth the reasons for the existence of women's libraries, other than perhaps outlining the historical origins of the library under consideration.

Another characteristic of the literature on women's libraries is that the authors of the accounts are often workers at such institutions, or former workers, or other women closely associated with the library. Whilst this perhaps enables a greater degree of insight unavailable to an external researcher, it can also lead to a degree of partiality,

perhaps creating a less critical description of the library. This factor, combined with the first point, suggest that some of the literature has arisen out of a desire for profile-raising. As is discussed in this thesis, many women's libraries have low profiles and are not known outside of small interested circles. These papers offer the libraries a chance to inform a wider community about their existence and their work. These two characteristics of the literature are therefore not entirely unexpected, given the situation of women's libraries.

Thirdly, and a more positive point, the literature is international in its nature as all continents are included, reflecting the global existence of women's libraries and resource centres. This facilitates a greater comparative understanding of the issues, and reveals that there are common problems, solutions and ideas for women's libraries across the world.

Of particular relevance for this thesis are two pieces of work by Rosie Ilett (Ilett, 2002; Ilett, 2003). Her earlier work focuses on the feminist, or otherwise, nature of women's health centres in the UK. She found that there were "minimal linkages" between librarianship and feminist thinking, leaving women's health information centres isolated from both feminism and librarianship (Ilett, 2002, p. 33). Her PhD thesis considers what she describes as a crisis in librarianship in the UK, and discusses the extent it exists in, and is overcome by, women's libraries. If librarianship is a female-dominated profession (at least at the lower levels of hierarchy), is there evidence of feminism having an influence on professional practices? Again, she found little evidence of feminism in librarianship. One section of her thesis comprises of case-study research into three women's libraries in Great Britain, analysing the extent to which they have rejected male-orientated library processes and could be considered to be new gendered spaces.

Ilett's work forms a basic model on which this work is constructed. This thesis expands her case study approach to cover nine institutions; it also uses the concepts of engagement with the professions and with feminism as an indicator of the degree of isolation faced by women's libraries in the British Isles.

The literature on women's libraries, archives and resource centres, whilst international in scope, is lacking in analytical discussion, comparative research and direct application to current situations in libraries. This thesis is therefore well placed to contribute to the literature on women's libraries and archives in the British Isles, and specifically to examine the situation in Wales.

1.10 Engagement with librarianship

Women's libraries have inherent links with the library and archive professions. In terms of the professionalism of the libraries, issues such as adhering to basic standards, employment of qualified personnel, and classification are analysed in the thesis, to discover the degree to which the women's libraries are engaged with the profession. In relation to their commitments to both feminism and librarianship, as outlined by Ilett, are they, as women's libraries, finding different ways of organising and disseminating knowledge that is more appropriate for women's information needs?

The engagement with the profession is a two-way process, and whilst some of the women's libraries appear not to be heavily engaged with the profession, it is also evident that the library and archive professions are not extensively engaged with women's libraries and archives. This can be seen in the lack of literature on women's libraries within library journals, and the (anecdotal) lack of awareness of the existence of women's libraries by current library professionals.⁹ This may lead the women's libraries to exist in isolated communities, reliant upon their own networks, rather than being incorporated into an extensive and national library network.

The existence of women's libraries also has relevance to the field of 'special' libraries. Their focus on a particular group (women) is replicated in other special

⁹ When talking about my thesis with colleagues within the library profession it was apparent that very few had heard of women's libraries.

libraries e.g. business, charity and religious libraries. Other special libraries display similar characteristics and face similar problems as women's libraries. For example, the Working Class Movement Library (WCML) in Salford, is currently undergoing major changes, partly due to the withdrawal of financial support from Salford City Council (who had provided a grant since 1987). In June 2005 the WCML was awarded a Project Planning Grant of £48,700 by the Heritage Lottery Fund which will facilitate the assessment of cataloguing and conservation needs and also develop an audience development plan. The WCML states that:

Despite financial uncertainties and restrictions our ever growing band of volunteers continues to bring some level of order and openness to the uncatalogued mass of donations and acquisitions which keep arriving at our door. (WCML, 2005, n. p.)

This appears to be similar to the situation of many of the women's libraries: uncertain funding, reliance upon volunteers and slightly disorganised collections and stock (see Chapter 4).

Yet despite similarities in structure, women's libraries (and other libraries that focus on a 'cause' or campaign) tend to be ignored within the literature on special libraries. For example, several national and international directories of special libraries do not list many (or any) of the women's libraries in Great Britain. A *directory of rare book and special collections in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland* lists the Fawcett Library, which, it states "is the only major British library specialising in works by and about women and the feminist movement" (Bloomfield, 1997, p. 212). With at least 10 other women's libraries in the British Isles, this statement is inaccurate. No other women's library is mentioned by Bloomfield. Likewise, the 2002 edition of the *ASLIB Directory of Information Sources in the United Kingdom* contains entries for the Women's Library, and the Feminist Library Resource and Information Centre, but not for other women's libraries in Great Britain (ASLIB, 2002). And the *Directory of Special Collections in Western Europe* has only one entry for a Women's History Collection in Denmark, with nothing in Great Britain at all (Gallico, 1993).

This omission from directories is replicated in the literature on special libraries and may be due to the (sometimes loose) definitions of ‘special libraries’. An early definition was that special libraries served a specialist clientele working for a common purpose and their collections were not normally directly available to the public. Special libraries could be commercial, governmental, industrial, medical, scientific, technical, research or belong to a professional society (Astall, 1966, p. 9). More recently, special libraries have been defined as “information units that are part of parent organisations, and that specialise in certain topics” (Eastwood and Tompson, 2001, p. 1), including

those information organisations sponsored by private companies, government agencies, not-for-profit organizations, or professional associations. Subject-speciality units in public and academic libraries are usually labelled special libraries as well. (Mount, 1995, p. 2)

Whilst women’s libraries are frequently not-for-profit organisations and thus could be included in this definition, they are rarely mentioned in the texts or provided as examples; case studies are in general sourced from business, government and charities (Mount, 1995, pp. 231-257). Eastwood and Tompson also argue that special libraries have a mission to provide focused information to a defined user group to further the goals of the parent organisation, and, in the UK are often known as ‘workplace libraries’ (Eastwood & Tompson, 2001, p. 1). Whilst the first part of this definition can be true for women’s libraries, the notion of workplace libraries is more closely associated with commerce rather than a library dedicated to a cause or social campaign.

Furthermore, although there is a Special Libraries Association in America, there is no similar organisation in Great Britain. (Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) has a special interest group for ‘industrial and commercial’ libraries, along with other types of libraries e.g. prison, health.) Staff working in the women’s libraries may feel that their work is unlike that of an academic, public or special library, which may lead to disengagement with librarianship. This may be increased when one considers their omission from a recent key CILIP publication: *An Investment in Knowledge: Library and*

Information Services in the United Kingdom 2002. The 'Communities' section which covers public, academic and national libraries, library and information services for schools, further education and higher education, and a section on 'workplace libraries' which covers government libraries, research councils, professional bodies and medical and health care libraries (Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals, 2002, p. 2). Although this publication could not be expected to mention every single type of special library, one section referring to some of the other library and information services that do not fit the traditional categories could have been included. Thus, the disengagement between women's libraries and the profession is apparent from both sides.

Women's libraries, whilst revealing similarities to, and potential links with academic, public and special libraries, can also be linked to the idea of 'virtual' libraries. As with special libraries, there is debate over the exact terms and definitions of virtual libraries, with further confusion due to the additional names of 'digital library', 'library without walls', 'electronic library', 'hybrid library' and 'gateway library' (Muir, 2001, p. 499). Muir's definitions are that a digital library is a space, either physical, virtual or both, where a significant proportion of the resources exist only in digital form; a virtual library is a collection of web resources; and a hybrid library is part of the continuum from conventional library to full digital library, with seamless resource discovery for the end user (Muir, 2001, pp. 499-500).

From these definitions, we can see that some of the women's libraries could be classed as hybrid libraries in that they provide some electronic resources. Eastwood & Thompson state that a "digital library links users with resources electronically" whilst a virtual library provides all services electronically rather than in a building (2001, pp. 2-3). Whilst the Women's History Project is a virtual library in the sense that it does not have a physical space, the collections are not available electronically, and is perhaps best described as a portal or gateway, as it points the user to resources, all of which are in hard-copy. The other women's library without physical

space is AMC/WAW. However, AMC/WAW is also neither a digital or virtual library, as the collections are not accessible in electronic format.

From this discussion we can see that the women's libraries that do not have a physical space do not easily match the broad definitions of virtual or digital libraries. They are however, similar to electronic directories and mapping projects. *Genesis*, the mapping project coordinated by the Women's Library, is an important example and along with the projects in Ireland and Wales, is part of a wider recognised network of mapping projects such as those operated by the National Archives (National Archives, n. d., n. p.)

Women's libraries and archive services do not need to be thought of as being completely isolated from the library and archive profession, despite the difficulty in placing them within recognised models of libraries. Their multiple roles, aims and services also link them to resource centres and Citizens' Advice Bureaux. For example, some of the libraries visited offer free advice sessions (counselling, financial, etc), run training programmes and reading groups, have volunteer schemes, and seek to empower women to change their lives where necessary.

Women's libraries therefore, whilst perhaps seemingly isolated from the professional library and archive community in their practice, have parallels with a number of related library, archive and information-orientated developments. As a consequence, the potential for developing a women's library in Wales is not only related to current circumstances for women's libraries in the rest of the British Isles, but is also dependent upon what type or model of women's library might be most appropriate (if any), and to which element(s) of the information profession they feel most aligned.

1.11 Engagement with feminism

Women's libraries are historically rooted in the history of feminism and the various campaigns for women's equality and empowerment that have taken place in the

previous 150 years. (For a detailed description of the history of the women's libraries explored by this thesis see section 3.10 in Chapter 3). They exist in order to assist women in finding information to help in their contemporary lives, to document and preserve previous lives and experiences of women and to facilitate research into women's lives. Despite their existence and principles being directly relevant to both women's studies and women's history, there has been little research on women's libraries themselves from these multi-disciplinary fields (see Chapter 2). Whilst some women's studies scholars may refer to, or acknowledge various women's libraries that they have used in the process of writing their books (e.g. Beddoe, 1993, p. 13; Rowbotham, 1999, p. xiii), as institutions in themselves they appear to have been overlooked as a research subject.

It is possible to argue that there is a slight disengagement within women's studies between the theoretical field of women's studies and the practice of women's libraries. After investigating the current situation of women's libraries in the British Isles, it is also possible to see that the reverse is true (see Section 5.6 in Chapter 5).

Pritchard argues that librarianship is concerned with utilising the best structures for organising knowledge and information and, that feminist thought questions the concepts of knowledge. Therefore, feminist thought can be used to question the accepted structures and institutions that are built around knowledge i.e. questioning library structures (Pritchard, 1995, p. 15). Consequently, given the historical and theoretical motives for the creation of women's libraries, it could be expected that they too challenge traditional ways of knowing. This could perhaps be seen in using feminist classification systems, or approaching the provision of information from a different perspective. This thesis seeks to explore the degree to which women's libraries are therefore engaged with feminism in terms of their practices, structures and approaches.

1.11.1 Women-only spaces

Although women's libraries do not appear to have a high profile within women's studies, their existence contributes to a key debate within feminism and women's

studies: that of separate spheres or mainstream integration. Whilst some women believe that only by creating separate spheres and agencies for women will women's rights be achieved, others believe that in order to change society, women's issues need to be integrated into the mainstream and to do otherwise is to create a ghetto of 'women's things' (Russ, 1984, p. 53). For example, should Women's Studies be taught as a separate subject at universities, or be incorporated across all disciplines so that all students become aware of the issues? Spender believes that separatism can lead to a ghetto, whilst integration can add valuable insight into previously closed areas (Spender, 1985, p. 20). A differing view is that "both [approaches] have value and because neither one is effective on its own" there remains a need to maintain a focus on separate women's issues, as well as integrating it into all disciplines (Pritchard, 1995, p. 22). With regard to women's libraries, the approach could therefore be that it remains necessary to maintain separate women's libraries and archives until women feel that public, academic and national libraries, public record offices and Citizen Advice Bureaux contain the contemporary documents and archives that meet their needs.

The separatist vs. mainstream debate surrounding women's libraries highlights other divisions within feminism e.g. activism vs. theory, grassroots campaigning vs. academic women's studies, and radical vs. liberal feminists. According to these debates, there are two possible routes for women's libraries to follow: appealing to theorists (by providing documents, archives etc) or appealing to grassroots activists (by providing resource material, courses to change women's lives etc). This division is revealed in the findings of this thesis in the existence of different models of women's libraries and in the slight degree of antagonism between the different approaches, each seeing their methods as the most appropriate (see Section 4.10 in Chapter 4). Moss asks whether the contribution of feminism is to not only provide an understanding of the world (theory), but also to change it (activism) (Moss, 2002, p. 13). I would argue that both elements are important and the different models of women's libraries not only serve different needs, but combined they seek to improve the lives of women, whether it is through theory or practice. As was mentioned above, a dual approach may be the most effective method.

1.11.2 History of feminism

It is important to understand the history of feminism in order to place women's libraries in an appropriate context. In the British Isles it is possible to distinguish three different 'waves' of feminism, with different outlooks and perspectives. Feminist theories arose initially out of a desire for equity and developed during the early human rights movements e.g. women's suffrage, which began in America and Britain in the 1850s (Watkins, Rueda & Rodriguez, 1992, p. 63). This 'first wave' of feminism was principally concerned with suffrage, social reform, temperance movements and equity for women (Moss, 2002, p. 4). Equity and equal rights were (and still are) generally modelled in terms of being equal with men's standards. The period after women achieved suffrage in the UK (1918 and 1928) until after World War II is considered to be a quiet period in terms of feminist activity (Legates, 2001, p. 341), and Carter notes that government propaganda to encourage women back into their homes after World War I had been so successful that there was enforced conscription of some women during World War II (Carter, 1988, p. 11). After their extensive war effort in World War II, women were again persuaded that their intended roles were in the home, and it was not until the 1960s that women's issues become prominent again.

The 'second wave' of feminism (often referred to as the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM)) occurred from c.late 1960s - mid1980s, with a shift in focus to the different nature of women, emphasising women's standpoints, experiences and perspectives. A number of key publications by women contributed to the discussion surrounding women's lives e.g. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963 (published 1968 in the UK); Eva Figes' *Patriarchal Attitudes*, 1970; Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: the case for feminist revolution*, 1970; Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, 1970; Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, 1970; Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*, 1970 and Juliet Mitchell's *Women's Estate*, 1971. In terms of magazines, the UK feminist magazine *Spare Rib* (1972-1993) had a circulation of 21,000 by 1979 (Carter, 1988, p. 56). In the USA by 1971 there were over 100 journals and newspapers dedicated to women's issues (Schneir, 1995, pp.

130-131). This primary source material forms a natural foundation for collections within women's libraries and, as will be seen later, was the impetus for the establishment of some of the women's libraries.

The late 1960s and the 1970s were a period of protest movements, counter-culture and participatory democracy. Protests surrounding peace, the Vietnam war and civil rights were prominent particularly during 1968-70. There were riots in Paris in the spring of 1968, protests at the Miss World beauty contest in 1969, and women textile machinists in Ford's Dagenham plant in the UK went on strike in 1968 for equal pay and for a reappraisal of their jobs. The second wave of feminism has sometimes therefore been regarded as having socialist and Marxist origins (Rowbotham, 1972, p. 95; Watkins, Rueda & Rodriguez, 1992, p. 117). Despite this connection with working class campaigns, the feminist movement in the UK can also be seen to have academic roots as some of the early groups were connected to universities (Rowbotham, 1972, p. 95) and the first National Liberation Conference in the UK was held at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1970¹⁰. Over 400 women (and some men) attended the conference, which was subsequently held annually until 1978, which was the last WLM conference (Ross, Bearse & Bogle, 1996, p. 32).

During these WLM conferences specific demands were made. Initially there were four demands: equal pay, equal education and opportunity, 24-hour childcare, and free contraception with abortion on demand (Carter, 1988, p. 55). These demands were subsequently increased to seven at the 1978 WLM conference:

- Equal pay for equal work
- Equal education and job opportunities
- Free contraception and abortion on demand
- Free 24-hour community-controlled childcare
- Legal and financial independence for women
- An end to discrimination against lesbians

¹⁰ Carter states that the idea for the first conference came from the Ruskin History Workshop which had Socialist and working class perspectives (Carter, 1988, p. 54)

- Freedom for all women from intimidation by the threat or use of male violence. (Fairbairns et al, 2002, n. p.)

The late 1960s and the 1970s were also important for women in terms of legislation that sought to improve their lives e.g. the Abortion Act 1967, the Divorce Reform Act 1969, the Equal Pay Act 1970 (in full force December 1975), the Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act 1970, the Guardianship Act 1973, the Social Security Pensions Act 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 including the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission, and the Domestic Violence Act 1976. Some of the demands were therefore covered by legislation, although as the statistics in Section 1.6 revealed, legislation does not always ensure the conditions are met.

The growth in legislation, published literature, women's centres and women's libraries and the growing consciousness of women's issues, all coincided with an expansion in the number of female students at university, and the subsequent development of women's studies as a discipline in higher education establishments (Evans, 2005, p. 16). The first MA in women's studies was in 1980 at the University of Kent at Canterbury (Evans, 1990, p. 26).

Despite these various achievements and activities, and the seven core demands, Carter notes that there was no homogenous WLM:

[there] are problems in identifying precisely what is meant by the Women's Liberation Movement, because it never had a centralised organisation or clear ideology. (Carter, 1988, p. 51)

The advantages of this were that it could appeal to a broad range of women; the danger was that women with very different ideologies would not always be able to work together for a common cause. Splits began to appear in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when different approaches to feminism became evident. The main splits were between liberal feminists (aligning themselves with the first wave), socialist feminists (who saw class as the oppressing force), and radical feminists (who saw patriarchy as the main cause of women's oppression). This is a vastly over-simplified division, and within these types there are further sub-types (see Tong,

1988, for a comprehensive review). The importance of the different types of feminism is that these ideologies had a direct impact on the organisations that were established at the time e.g. the Feminist Library in 1975.

The women's movement of the 1970s "fragmented into much smaller often single-issue groups, and it is far less in evidence" (Beddoe, 1998, p. 7). Many internal debates centred on pornography, with pro- and anti- groups creating deep divisions within the movement. Critiques of the WLM also came from women themselves. These women represented groups that did not feel part of the generic WLM which, they argued, was white, educated, middle-class and Western in outlook and assumptions. Thus Asian, black, lesbian and older women exposed the WLM as falling into the same trap as the traditions that they were trying to escape – that of labelling all women the same, or imposing their own power and authority over minorities. As the movement fractured, it coincided with the Thatcher years of government (1979-1990), which were notable for public service cuts and unpopular policies, which often had a greater impact on women as they tend to be more dependent upon public services such as health and transport. The mid-late 1980s also saw the rise of what is referred to as a 'backlash' against women's rights and the notion of 'post-feminism'.

Whilst Susan Faludi's book *Backlash* is based on the situation in America, its findings are also applicable to the UK. She details the numerous ways that men (and women), society, the media, employers and the Government were creating a backlash against women. The 1980s were also a time where there was:

a general retreat of all radical agendas in the face of global economic recessing and the associated policy reaction of conservative and social democratic governments, but also of internal fractures around issues of race, sexuality and class. (Scott, 1998, p. 276)

This retreat has lasted over twenty years, and has led to the situation whereby:

one of the many paradoxes of thinking about gender in 2005 is that the new scepticism about the importance of gender comes from within feminism itself. (Evans, 2005, p. 16)

The backlash against feminism, from society and among feminists, coincided with the notion of post-feminism, connected to postmodernism. Such a stance argues that there cannot be one universal category of 'woman' as this ignores individual differences. Postmodernism rejects universalism and instead celebrates difference. The aforementioned critique of the WLM by a variety of 'different' women can thus be seen from this perspective e.g. black women, women from developing countries. But Strickland contends that the postmodern fascination for difference can oversimplify issues and actually gloss over differences – in saying 'we're all different' the differences are actually ignored, with a lack of overall context and a danger of fragmentation (Strickland, 1994, p. 269).

The term post-feminism is problematic for semantic reasons. The media have tended to use the term not in its original philosophical sense, but in the sense that we are now living in a *post*-feminist society, thus regarding the feminist era as over.

The time we live in is re-named 'post-feminism', implying both that feminism is a passé label and that everything women could reasonably want has already been accomplished. (Oakley & Mitchell, 1997a, p. 4)

A glance at the seven demands of the WLM and current statistics on women show that this is not the case. Kramarae & Spender argue that as feminism is not a stage or an event, it is not possible to have *post*-feminism (Kramarae & Spender, 1992, p. 6). They argue that it is a way of living and thinking. Using the term post-feminism disguises this key element of feminism and instead has the intention of signalling the end of the second-wave of feminism, and to some extent, to cut off this period of women's liberation from any future developments. This denying of history is a classic example of how women's voices from the past are silenced and left for a new generation to discover (Spender, 1982), and is one reason why women's history has been seen as important. Rosenfelt & Stacey contend that the use of the term post-feminism:

demarcates an emerging culture and ideology that simultaneously incorporates, revises and depoliticizes many of the fundamental issues advanced by Second Wave feminism. (1987, p. 77)

That is, not only does the term imply the death of the women's movement, but it also revises the previous movement. This can be seen particularly in the related term

of 'third wave' feminism. This term appeared slightly after the term post-feminism, with some dating it to the mid 1980s (Orr, 1997, p. 30) and to the 'riot grrrl' music scene in America in 1990/1991 (Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997, p 13; Orr, 1997, p. 38). These bands, and other young women, began to publish their own newsletters and created their own interpretations of what it was to be a feminist. Many see these printed magazines (known as 'zines') and more recently web pages (webzines) as the primary sources of third wave feminism. Zines are fanzines and magazines written by enthusiasts; they have various forms but are typically self-published, designed, written or edited by a single person. The British Library is building up its collections of zines, as is the Women's Library (British Library, n. d., feminist; Women's Library, 2005, zines). See two examples below - Grrrl Zine Network and Bunnies on Strike.

Figure 1: Grrrl Zine Network screenshot

Figure 2: Bunnies on Strike zine screenshot

Third wave feminism is disputed by some writers who claim that it seeks to not only disassociate itself with the previous waves, but also to dismiss previous preoccupations (Bailey, 1997, p. 19; Orr, 1997;) and is critical of their achievements.

The main problem with the third wave is that they are not rebelling against the reality of feminism, but a false image constructed by the media throughout the second wave and particularly the conservative backlash era of the 1980s. (Schriefer, n. d., n. p.)

The key reason for this rejection can be seen in the combination of third wave feminism, post-feminism and the backlash movement. These forces have subtly created a single unified stereotype of a second wave feminist that is ridiculed and derided. The stereotype is thus frequently presented as a bra-burning¹¹, un-shaved, dungaree-wearing, man-hating lesbian, unable to have fun, who rejects all elements

¹¹ The notion of 'bra-burning' is a misnomer. In 1968 a group of 200 women demonstrated at the Miss America beauty pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The women set up a 'freedom trash can' into which they threw items of female oppression e.g. girdles, high heeled shoes and bras. This raised considerable media attention and they were inaccurately labelled as 'bra-burners' (Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997, p. 13; Schneir, 1995, p. 125).

of femininity, believes that ‘all men are rapists’¹² and is anti-pornography and pro-abortion. However, as the previous description of the women’s movement has shown, there were diverse elements to all the campaigns, and the second wave of feminism in the 1970s and early 1980s was far from unified (Bailey, 1997, p. 23). In fact, differences on sexuality, pornography and abortion were all catalysts in the division and demise of the second wave of feminism of the 1980s.

If the third wave does not identify with the politics of the second wave of feminism, what is its identity and its issues of concern? One of the key identifiers appears to be age – third wave feminists tend to be in their 20s or 30s, i.e. at the time of Alfonso & Trigilio’s and Orr’s articles, those born in the late 1960s or in the 1970s (sometimes referred to as Generation X) (Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997, p. 9; Orr, 1997, p. 29). For today, third-wave women would be made up of those born c.1970-1985. Yet it was often young women in their 20s and 30s who were involved in the feminist movements of the late 1960s and the 1970s. Is it really a distinct different wave, or just differing generational standpoints (Orr, 1997, p. 29)? That is, is it a case of women of a certain age creating their own movements?

Third wave feminists also claim to celebrate ‘difference’, engaging with the ideas of feminists of colour, queer theory and other differences, widening the traditional image of feminists as white and middle-class. They encourage individualism, and “everyone to identify with their own issues based on their experiences” (Schriefer, n. d., n. p.). Yet, during the second wave, the mantra ‘the personal is political’ was a key slogan, and although this generally referred to the fact that ‘personal’ issues were political issues (e.g. domestic violence) it can also be extended to the examples of consciousness-raising groups whereby each woman’s experiences were discussed as her awareness of feminist issues grew.

Another contentious issue is that the two waves are very close together, with little time for considered reflection or theorising, and that it is only possible to determine

¹² The statement ‘all men are rapists’ has been ascribed to both Catherine A Mckinnon and Andrea Dworkin, and although both were known for their anti-pornography stances, neither actually said this

the timing, content and style of a new wave *afterwards*, not during it (Bailey, 1997, p. 18). Conversely, the first and second waves were marked by lengthy distinct movements of activism (Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997, p. 8). The third wave, in comparison, does not identify with any single unifying cause or campaign. Indeed, Alfonso & Trigilio argue that the third wave seems more “of an academic construction, used to mark the development of postmodernist critiques of second wave feminism” than a distinct movement in its own right (Alfonso & Trigilio, 1997, p. 8). Thus there are fears, particularly of second wave feminists, that it is not closely associated with the social and political problems of ordinary women. This could be true, if it is also accepted that many third wavers have come to feminism from academic institutions or women’s studies (or more often gender studies) courses. This is in contrast to those who became feminists during the second wave through activism or consciousness-raising groups (Siegel, 1997, p. 62). The difference in the different waves and their different identities can be seen in the different models of women’s libraries in the British Isles. And thus the current state of feminism in society has implications for the potential for developments in Wales.

1.11.3 *Feminism in Wales*

It is essential to understand the current social, economic and political situation in Wales in order to assess the potential for a women’s library in Wales, and it is also necessary to understand the development of feminism in Wales, as distinct from England and Scotland.

Women’s emancipation has rarely featured in the ‘traditional’ history books of Wales (Rolph, 2001, p. 87) although recent publications such as *Our Mothers’ Land* (1991), *Parachutes and Petticoats: Welsh women writing on the Second World War* (1992), *Our Sisters’ Land* (1994), *Struggle or Starve: Women’s lives in the south Wales valleys between the two World Wars* (1998), *Out of the Shadows: A history of women in twentieth-century Wales* (2000), *Changing Times: Welsh women writings on the 1950s and 1960s* (2003) and *Women in Welsh History* (2004) have sought to

(Moorcock & Dworkin, 1995, n. p.).

remedy this situation. What is noticeable about all these publications however is that their sole concern is with women's *history*. They are part of the women's history movement, which has been driven by Deirdre Beddoe, who was appointed as the first Professor of Women's History in the UK (at the University of Glamorgan). Her guest lecture at the annual lecture of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales in 2004 discussed the paucity of research on women from Wales who were involved in national politics, and made reference to the lack of remaining evidence of the papers of Welsh branches of women's suffrage groups (Beddoe, 2004). The more recent past is also often neglected, which has unfortunate consequences for researchers concerned with the impact of events from the late 1960s onwards.

As well as being involved with suffrage campaigns and war efforts, women in Wales also formed their own organisations. The Women's Institute (WI) for example, was founded in Wales in 1915, in Anglesey, North Wales. Whilst not 'feminist' in the radical sense, the WI still created a female-only space for women to discuss matters of concern to them. (The Welsh-language equivalent, Merched y Wawr, was founded in 1967, near Bala, North Wales, after the WI refused to let local branches conduct their meetings in Welsh).

There is little formal or published documentation on the second wave of the women's liberation movement in Wales. Indeed, it is even argued that "the role of the Women's Liberation Movement in Wales during the 1970s ... is being overlooked" (Rolph, 2001, p. 87; Rolph, 2003, pp. 43-44). However, recent ambitious projects have focused not only on oral history (see the *Women in Wales 1920-1960 Oral History Project* by Merched y Wawr, in Welsh) but also on documenting - in the form of reference guides - details of the known items relating to the WLM in South Wales (see the South Wales Feminist History And Archive Project).

Some have argued that the Welsh language movement was of prime importance to women in Wales during the late 1960s and the 1970s, and thus their campaigning

energy was not directed towards feminist ideals. Or that feminism in Wales has not had the same level of prominence as it has had in England and exists at on a smaller scale. This may be partly because “feminism is still frequently viewed with suspicion by Welsh-identified communities as an alien and divisive Anglo-American phenomenon” (Aaron, 1994, p. 183). Similarly, Lloyd-Morgan has argued that because feminist ideas were brought in from England and the USA and remodelled for Wales they tended to generate first in the English-language and urban areas of Wales (Lloyd-Morgan, 1993, pp. 23-24) which excluded rural and Welsh-speaking women.

Yet, a 1984 directory of women’s groups in Wales lists a women’s section of the Welsh nationalist party Plaid Cymru and various bilingual or Welsh-language women’s groups in Bangor, Caernarfon and Llanidloes (Women’s Enterprise Bureau, 1984, pp. 10, 11, 15, 40.) In addition, in 1986 a group of four women drew attention to women’s issues in Welsh by editing a special edition of *Y Traethodydd* (*The Essayist*) and Rolph argues that there is evidence that some of the earlier consciousness-raising groups were in Welsh only (Rolph, 2001, p. 88). Also, Honno Gwasg Menywod Cymru/ Honno Welsh Women’s Press (established 1986) was founded by a group of Welsh-speaking women who met at the national annual (Welsh language) Eisteddfod.

It is claimed that:

[I]t is only in the 1990s that we have seen at last a small trickle of feminist theory and feminist literary criticism in Welsh, much of it covering ground now somewhat passé in European terms. (Lloyd-Morgan, 1993, p. 23)

Subsequently, she argues that Wales has moved from pre- to post-feminism in one step, without experiencing the movement itself. Yet the evidence below, of the formation of women’s groups and all-Wales conferences in the early 1970s would suggest that women in Wales were aware of the feminist movement and were active in the 1970s and 1980s. Lloyd-Morgan’s quote therefore highlights the ever present divide between grassroots activism and academic theory.

As in England, the WLM in Wales can be seen to date from 1970, when a group of women met at Cardiff University. The Cardiff Women's Action Group campaigned on a variety of issues including health, education, contraception and abortion, nursery provision and employment rights. The group was also instrumental in the area of domestic violence, establishing the first refuge in Wales in 1975 (in Cardiff) and founding Welsh Women's Aid which opened its first office in January 1978 (Rolph, 2001, pp. 89-90). (The first refuge in the UK for battered women – the term used in the 1970s – was established in 1972 in Chiswick.) In addition, the Women's Rights Committee for Wales was founded in 1974. This group had a formal committee structure and attracted many older women who campaigned for equal rights issues (Rolph, 2001, p. 92).

Outside of Cardiff, the Swansea Women's Group was established in 1972 and they produced their own newsletter *Women Come Together* along with practical handbooks (Rolph, 2001, p. 90). They were constituted from two slightly different groups – one based at the university and one in the working class areas of East Swansea (Draisey, 2004, p. 180). They also worked closely with the group in Cardiff, and established a refuge in Swansea in 1978 and a separate women's space in the form of Swansea Women's Centre in 1979. Although other women's centres were founded across Wales e.g. Bangor, Cardiff and Gwent Women's Resource Centre (Dee & Keineg, 1987, p. 43), Swansea is the only remaining women's centre in Wales (Rolph, 2001, p. 91; Rolph, 2003, p. 55). It has been argued that these women's resource centres were essential "practical responses to one of the major problems – access to information" (Dee & Keineg, 1987, p. 42). Swansea was also the host of the first All-Wales Women's Liberation Conference in July 1974 (Rolph, 2001, p. 91), and Aberystwyth hosted Welsh National Women's Liberation Conference in 1975 (Ross, Bearse & Bogle, 1996, p. 19).

In terms of literature that may form the basis for a collection on the women's movement in Wales, there is little surviving evidence or research. In 1977 *Rhiannon: a paper for women in Wales*, a bilingual feminist magazine was founded (and ran until 1979, Rolph, 2003, p. 53). Apart from rare one-sentence mentions in

monographs, there is no further information about this publication¹³. Other women's magazines or newspapers had short life-spans and have not had a sufficient history to afford them attention in research papers or monographs e.g. *Electra* magazine founded in South Wales in 1984 which only had one issue (Dee & Keineg, 1987, p. 45-46). Other writing projects included WomenWrite Press, founded as a community publisher, and Honno Welsh Women's Press which published its first two books in February 1987. In the area of research and women's history, Swansea Women's History Group was founded in 1983 by Ursula Masson, Gail Allen and Jen Wilson (Dee & Keineg, 1987, p. 58). Also in the arts there were two female film companies: Red Flannel Films which was formed in 1985 in Pontypridd (Dee & Keineg, 1987, p. 76) and Boadicea (Rolph, 2001, p. 94).

A number of women's groups continued to be established during the 1980s, building on the developments of the 1970s. For example, Wales Assembly of Women was founded in 1984 in preparation for the Nairobi round of the United Nations Conference on Women in 1985. This group is still in existence today and in many respects, represents a 'liberal' approach to feminism. Women's organisations such as Chwarae Teg and South Glamorgan Women's Workshops were founded in the early 1980s, and the first MA course in women's studies in Wales was established at University College Cardiff in 1988 (Draisey, 2004, p. 186). A more recent development, reflecting the third wave of feminism, was the creation in 1993 of MEWN Cymru, the Minority Ethnic Women's Network Wales. Initially based in Cardiff, it now has branches in Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and North Wales (MEWN Cymru, 2005, n. p.).

The mid 1980s were also fairly active in terms of women in local politics. South Glamorgan established Wales's first (and only) local authority Women's Committee in 1985; prominent current Assembly Members such as Jane Hutt were involved

¹³ It is not held by the National Library of Wales. The Periodical Holdings of the Feminist Archive North lists Rhiannon: Paper for Women in Wales among its holdings, but no dates are provided (Feminist Archive North, n. d.)

(Dee & Keineg, 1987, p. 29)¹⁴. Other initiatives in cultural and social activities included the first International Women's Day event in Cardiff (March 8th 1985) – an event which still takes place today; and Women in Wales/Merched yng Nghymru Week 12-18th September 1983 (Dee & Keineg, 1987, p. 40).

The 1980s also saw the significant involvement of women in Wales in the peace movement. A woman from Wales, Ann Pettitt, conceived the idea of a march from Cardiff to Greenham Common in response to the siting of American nuclear Cruise Missiles at the American military base near Newbury. The march took place in August and September 1981 and was initially made up of women, men and children. However, after disputes and tensions at the base, the camp became women only in 1982. The camp was known as Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp and in 1982 over 30,000 women attended an 'Embrace the Base' vigil. The last cruise missile left in 1991, and in 1994 the camps were finally dismantled. Greenham Common has become a key period in protest history, and a testament to the vision and determination of women. There is now a plaque there to commemorate the protest period (Geograph British Isles, 2005, n. p.)¹⁵. Perhaps, like the earlier suffrage campaigns, it has come to symbolise women campaigning during a particular period, with the result that there are many books and discussions of its impact and the importance of it being a women-only camp.

Women in Wales were also heavily involved in the national miners strike of 1984-1985 but despite being active in these campaigns, there have been few Welsh women MPs in Parliament. There were no Welsh women MPs in Wales from 1970-1984, and from 1984-1997 there was only one (Ann Clwyd, Labour). When Labour won the election of 1997 the number of women MPs from Wales increased to four.

¹⁴ Jane Hutt is currently Minister for Health and Social Services and a Labour Assembly Member. She was a director of Chwarae Teg and non-executive director of the Cardiff Community Health Care Trust. She is a President of the Vale Housing Federation and a Trustee of the Vale Youth Forum. She is also Honorary Fellow of the University of Wales Institute Cardiff (Hutt, 2005, n. d.)

¹⁵ The only woman to die at the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was Helen Thomas from Newcastle Emlyn in Wales. She was killed by a truck on August 5th 1989 and was 22 years old. Helen would have set an historical precedent on August 18th when she would have been the first

It was not until the National Assembly for Wales elections of 1999 that there has been greater parity between the sexes of politically elected members. In the first election a total of 24 of the Assembly Members (AMs) were women (out of 60), but in 2003, the balance became 30 female and 30 male AMs, thus making Wales the first seat of government in the world to have as many women as men elected representatives.

Women's position in Wales has changed during the century, and it can be seen that first, second and third waves of feminism have left their various impressions on society. The statistics provided in section 1.6 however, show that women do not necessarily have equal lives when compared to men and the Equal Opportunities Commission in Wales, whilst celebrating the successes of the last 30 years, state there is still much to be done to achieve equality (Anon, 2005, p. 5). Women's weaker social, economic and cultural positions may be improved by improved access to information – about their contemporary lives and the lives of their predecessors.

1.12 Summary of Findings

As recognition of women's issues has grown, both domestically and worldwide, so has the need for comprehensive and reliable data on women and their concerns. Unfortunately, accessing well-organized information on women has not been easy ... information is still widely scattered and badly organized ... The value of collecting information specifically about women is still not widely recognized in many countries and the process of collecting, classifying, analyzing and managing women's information is difficult when organizations and government agencies lack the necessary technical resources and expertise. Also many countries lack an efficient system for distributing women's information to women's groups... . (Paik, 1998, p. 111)

person to have been tried in an English court in Welsh, her first language. (Geograph British Isles, 2005, n. p.; West Berkshire Council, 2003, n. p.)

This quote is by a South Korean information worker, yet based on my findings, her words could be applied to Britain, America, Germany or many other countries. This international similarity would suggest that not only are there common findings about women's libraries across the world, but also that women across the world face common problems. This could be seen as contradicting the postmodern view that there cannot be a single category 'woman' as it denies difference and assumes homogeneity. I would contend that it *is* possible to understand certain women's issues on a regional, national and international scale, and this is the case with women's information and women's libraries. That is not to say that every woman has the same needs, rather, that in general, the issues affecting women's libraries, archives or resource centres are replicated across the world.

This thesis places Wales in a wider context by investigating a range of issues regarding current women's libraries in the British Isles. It places the concept of women's libraries within a broader concept of women's spaces, and considered their roles in feminist knowledge creation and preservation. It also considers their engagement with the library profession and their relation to different models of libraries. Within the context of existing women's libraries in the British Isles and literature exploring women's information needs in Wales, the potential for the scope and viability of a women's library in Wales is discussed.

This thesis presents new findings on women's libraries based on empirical data from in-depth interviews and visits to nine women's libraries in the British Isles. The findings are critically examined within the context of the current circumstances of women's libraries in the British Isles, and the question of whether there is potential to develop a women's library in Wales is considered. The thesis addresses the paucity of material in this field and seeks to provide evidence that will contribute to other fields of librarianship and feminist research.

It was found that there are three models of women's libraries in Britain, each with their own positive and negative elements. These three models are:

- archive-based research institutions

- socially-orientated community-based resource centres
- virtual archive collections

In turning to Wales it is wise to consider what is most practical and appropriate, *at this moment in time*, rather than what might happen in an ideal world. Whilst it is stated as being a ‘dream’ of many involved in this discipline to have a building dedicated to women’s information and archives in Wales, it may be that the time for this model has passed. Thus, it may be more appropriate to conclude that a distributed approach, combined with a mapping of women’s resources in Wales, and improved networks particularly within women’s spheres would be most beneficial for women in Wales. Thus, elements of third wave feminism such as difference, diversity and engagement with popular culture (Gillis & Munford, 2003) would be deployed, whilst engagement with current professional practices and technological opportunities would be utilised to their maximum advantage.

The thesis also highlights potential areas for further research e.g.

- mapping of women’s resources and archives in Wales
- mapping of women’s organisations in Wales and creation of a directory
- a survey of information needs of women in Wales – leading to improving services for women in public libraries, if necessary, and assessing the potential usage of a women’s library/centre
- research into the actual use made of women’s libraries in Britain – user needs analysis.

1.13 Structure of thesis

The thesis continues with a detailed analysis of the literature in the field of women’s libraries, and the related area of women’s information needs. This provides an international context for the remainder of the investigation. Chapter 3 is a discussion of the methodology of the thesis, outlining the overarching epistemology, what methods were chosen and why, how the sample was chosen, the procedures for the interviews and other relevant issues. It also includes detailed descriptions of the nine

institutions that comprise the evidence of the thesis i.e. the libraries and archive projects. The descriptions cover matters such as origins, development, staffing levels, collections etc, and provide useful background information so that a reader can place the findings and analysis in a specific context. Chapter 4 presents the reader with the findings from the fieldwork, from the site visits and interviews. The findings are structured within core themes of: identities, structures, engagement with librarianship, engagement with feminism and physical space. This facilitated comparisons to be made between the various women's libraries and archives. The notion of three different models of women's libraries became apparent in the analysis of the findings. Chapter 5 consists of in-depth analysis of the findings, and Chapter 6 builds on this by focusing specifically on Wales. It considers the various options for Wales, in light of the three different models of women's libraries across the British Isles. It seeks to answer the research question as to whether there is potential for a women's library in Wales. Chapter 7 forms the Conclusion and draws together the findings, analysis and options for Wales.

1.14 Reflections on the development of the research topic

As women's libraries appear to be an unusual and little studied research area, it may be relevant to provide background information as to how I came into this field. With a history in librarianship (both practical and through qualifications) and a background interest in women's literature, over time I developed an interest in women's publishing, women's bookshops and women's organisations. I worked part-time for two years at Honno Welsh Women's Press, which contributed to my interest in this field. I also undertook research into the information needs of women artists in Wales (Tyler, 2002a), a topic which arose out of a women's artists conference where I was running a workshop on behalf of Honno. During the conference plenary, many of the delegates said they felt there was a lack of information and know-how. During that research I became aware of women's libraries as a research topic, although I had come across them earlier e.g. in 1998/1999 after seeing an advert for Glasgow Women's Library in a now-defunct

(1998-1999) feminist magazine *Sibyl*. My research into a specific area of women's information needs then developed into the field of women's libraries.

Feminist researchers recognise the importance of the researcher within the research, and therefore whilst remaining impartial throughout, it is sometimes important to note one's background or assumptions. I am a white, middle-class British female, and I also had, for example, perhaps naively expected the women's libraries to co-exist in a flourishing, active and close network. On not finding a large amount of evidence to support this I was surprised. If I had no assumptions about women's libraries, then the lack of networking or active co-operation may not have seemed as significant. What also may be relevant to note is that at the beginning of the research I thought the answer to 'should/could Wales have a women's library?' was 'yes', but over time I began to realise that the issue was more complex. This thesis therefore, represents an academic and yet also slightly personal response to the situation in Britain and specifically Wales.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Some of these collections are marginal to the library world, others are leaders in it. (Hildenbrand, 1986c, p. 137)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the literature on women's libraries. Literature in the related area of women's information needs is also evaluated, due to its connection to the field of women's libraries, and to help place the role of women's libraries within an information setting. As the thesis has a primary focus on Wales, literature focusing on relevant information and women's issues in Wales will also be discussed and analysed. The literature review is not concerned with the literature on women in libraries or librarianship as a career for women.

2.2 The nature of the literature

2.2.1 Searching for the literature

When beginning research in any area, one should establish a large set of keywords with which to locate the literature. Naturally, the words *woman*, *women* and *female* are all relevant here, but the broader term of *gender*, and increasingly, *gendered*, also need to be brought into keyword searches of catalogues and databases. As this research is primarily interested in *women's libraries*, *women's resource centres* and *women's archives*, these terms were also incorporated. It was also important to remember to change *centre* to *center* to allow American items to be retrieved.

Introduction of terms such as *library* or *libraries* brought up a large body of literature pertaining to women working in libraries, which was not the focus of this thesis. Thus with some of the terms, use of "quote marks" or AND or the + symbol were deployed in some electronic catalogues in order to retrieve relevant material. Once a large list of references had been built up through interrogating a number of library catalogues and online services (e.g. BIDS Ingenta, British Library, LISA (Library and Information

Science Abstracts), National Library of Wales, OCLC First Search, Web of Science), further items were identified through careful reading of the bibliographies of the identified literature. The literature search was conducted in the early stages of the thesis (i.e. the first six months), with further items being discovered over time; another extensive literature search was conducted six-nine months before completion in order to ensure that all the relevant and recent material had been found.

2.2.2 Characteristics of the literature

2.2.2.1 Type of literature

The majority of the literature relating to women's libraries, archives and resource centres tends to be descriptive accounts of single institutions or organisations e.g. Davaz-Mardin (2000) on the women's library in Istanbul, Turkey; or Posthumus (1992) on the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement (IIAV) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. This literature, whilst useful, informative and interesting, does not form a body of *empirical* research from which findings can be drawn. Further, as each women's library is considered in isolation, it promotes a impression that each institution is a lone survivor, or is unique in facing its own struggles. In fact, when the literature on women's libraries is collated, many similarities appear.

In a similar vein, the majority of the literature relating to women's information needs is regarded by Vyas as being "project specific and at micro-level", and it often falls into the category of grey literature¹ (Vyas, 1993, p. 150). For example, much gender information is often generated by small grassroots voluntary organisations (out of which

¹ Grey Literature is defined by the international Luxembourg Convention as: "Information produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body." (Grey Literature Network Service, n. d., n. p.). Broader definitions may refer to it as material that is not issued for public sale, and/or does not have an ISBN/ISSN (Council for British Archaeology, 2001, Appendix 4.2). It may now also include information provided via websites and electronic means.

the ‘second wave’ of feminism arose during the 1960s onwards), and may not be published or distributed formally through traditional mainstream channels, thus being hard to trace or obtain. Mbambo notes that the majority of women’s information in Africa is in the form of grey literature, which is difficult not only to disseminate but also to collect (Mbambo, 1999, p. 104). In addition, there may be no legal deposit for such items, and consequently some gender research may be difficult to discover, as Rathapo describes in relation to Botswana. To counter this problem she suggests establishing formal networks and greater co-ordination between various women’s organisations (Rathapo, 2000, p. 306). To some extent, the women’s resource centres and women’s libraries themselves can be useful in the role as repositories for such material.

The nature of the literature combined with the multi-disciplinary nature of the research, creates a situation where important information may be scattered and hard to find. From a feminist perspective, this serves to perpetuate the marginalisation of women’s issues across the world. The quote by Vyas in Section 1.3 in Chapter 1 underlines this isolation. Vyas’ recommendations are that there needs to be more dialogue between users and the library profession, more research to fill the gaps in the literature, and an improvement to the flow of official information about women (Vyas, 1993, p. 154). It is possible to see, when the research areas of women’s information needs and women’s libraries are combined, why there is a perceived lack of information; there is in fact very little overlap between the two research fields, and recommendations from one discipline are not taken up by the other, despite their common goals and objectives.

2.2.2.2 Authorship

It is perhaps unsurprising that the majority of writers discussing women’s libraries and women’s information needs are women themselves. In terms of the former discipline, the authors are predominantly those who are involved with the particular institution about which they are writing e.g. Chiguda, 1997; Colmer 1994; Darter, 1990; Davaz-Mardin, 2000; Davies & Walbe, 1982; Doughan 1990; Drenthe, 1993; Duguid, 2000; Greening, 2000; Hofmann-Weinberger & Willie, 1994; Ilett, 2003; Kramer, 1993;

Moseley, 1995; Paik, 1998; Pankhurst, 1987; Patrick, 2000; Posthumus, 1992; Richardson, 1987; Rolph, 2000 and Vriend, 2001. The majority of these articles serve to inform readers about the institutions and thus act as a form of profile-raising. Given their authorship, it is possible to see how particular positions may be enhanced, or conveniently sidelined, in the discussion. This, combined with the lack of empirical or evidence-based investigative research leads to a tendency of little critical debate surrounding the many interesting and important issues connected to women's libraries.

It is perhaps somewhat surprising that there is little literature on women's libraries within the inter-disciplinary field of women's studies. Can it be assumed that women's studies researchers who perhaps use women's libraries and archives do not consider these institutions as research topics? In addition, even though librarianship is often referred to as a female profession (Harris, 1992; Kolb & Schaffner, 2001, n. p.; McDermott, 1994), there appears to be little interest by female librarians in researching women's libraries.

2.2.2.3 Location of studies (geography)

The literature surrounding women's libraries has an international basis. This is in part due to the fact that there are nearly 400 women's libraries across the world (IIAV, 2005, n. p.). In terms of women's information needs research, there appear to be three areas of focus. These are: women's information needs in developing countries (e.g. Botswana, India); information needs of specific groups of women (e.g. abused women, business women) and thirdly, women's information needs from a health perspective. The latter often falls outside of the traditional library and information science areas and is only found when searches are conducted in databases that specifically include medical journals such as *Journal of Advanced Nursing* or *Journal of Clinical Nursing*.

As the findings of the literature review reveal (see Section 2.4.6), the similar positions of women's libraries and women's information needs, despite geographical, social,

economic and cultural differences, contradicts the postmodern perspective that universal categories such as 'women' are no longer relevant. Whilst an element of difference is expected, given the diverse nature of women's libraries, I believe the similarities are more revealing than the differences.

2.2.2.4 *Sources of publication*

Discussion of women's libraries is rarely found in mainstream feminist research or women's history monographs. For example, in *Women in grassroots communication: furthering social change* by Riaño (1994), there are no references in the index for 'information', 'library' or 'resource'. Yet the book is concerned with communication and thus communicating information. This book is unfortunately not an exception in its omission.

Analysis of my thesis' bibliography reveals that the literature is spread across a wide range of journals covering issues such as international development, library science, medicine, feminism, gender and women's history. There are few dedicated monographs in this subject matter. This may be because it is a broad, and yet specific, area. Existing books on this subject tend to be proceedings from conferences e.g. Moseley's *Women, information and the future: collecting and sharing resources worldwide* (1995) based on an international conference of the same name held in 1994, and *Women's issues at IFLA: Equity, gender and information on agenda. Papers from the programs of the Round Table on Women's Issues at IFLA Annual Conferences 1993-2002* edited by Siitonen (2003) (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions - IFLA).

In addition to formal published literature, some of the literature in the field of women's libraries is grey literature, and although referred to in some bibliographies, it can be difficult to locate or obtain, especially when it is of an international nature or produced by small locally-based grassroots organisations.

2.3 Women's libraries as a research area

The literature on women's libraries whilst not displaying a long history of theoretical debate and development, is diverse in its nature and scope. For reasons of clarity and coherence it has been classified in the subsequent review into the following categories:

- theoretical perspectives
- comparative studies
- empirical research
- library management issues
- histories and descriptive narratives
- international perspectives
- women's archives and women's history
- women and public libraries
- women's studies and women's libraries
- women, information and development

2.3.1 Theoretical perspectives of women's libraries

Some authors give brief theoretical reasons for the establishment of women's libraries, such as the quote by Kramer below:

The importance of access to relevant information for the feminist movement, for women's studies and for equal opportunities policies has been recognized for a long time. The difficulties involved in obtaining relevant books, articles, reports etc., on women in mainstream documentation are also well known. This has led women to establish their own libraries, archives and documentation centres. (Kramer, 1993, pp. 211-212)

Kramer also puts forward a theory of "three-generations" of women's libraries (see Section 1.4 in Chapter 1).

Davaz-Mardin deals in considerable depth with the theory of women's libraries within her discussion of the establishment of the Women's Library in Turkey. She notes that:

[t]hese libraries and archives constitute the memory of women and women's movements and their growth is parallel to the development of a feminist consciousness ... [and] ... they render the invisible women visible. (Davaz-Mardin, 2000, p. 449)

A further reason given by Davaz-Mardin for establishing such institutions is they are often formed out of a recognition that public and academic libraries do not contain material about women's lives and histories (Davaz-Mardin, 2000, p. 449). She notes also that the prime reasons for the foundation of the women's library in Turkey are "women's history" and "re-documenting the past" (Davaz-Mardin, 2000, p. 449). One focus for collection development that she argues is possible, and central, to women's libraries is to concentrate on ephemera and material about the daily and private lives of women e.g. diaries, paper, letters, art, films, oral history tapes and objects belonging to women e.g. banners and badges (Davaz-Mardin, 2000, p. 450). This type of material could form the basis for research collections and is not often collected by public or academic libraries. Further, she notes that:

Women's libraries have an important role to play in addition to the acquisition, preservation and dissemination of women's documents. A women's library clearly plays a role through its mere existence. ... Its existence stands against the historical omission of women in the acquisition, preservation and dissemination of documents. (Davaz-Mardin, 2000, p. 451)

She notes that a women's library has two missions: one is to spread awareness and to make connections between the old and the new documents, and the other is to re-evaluate material by bringing a feminist consciousness to researching documents (Davaz-Mardin, 2000, p. 452). She also highlights two key theoretical yet practical concerns for women's libraries. One is to face outwards, raise their profiles, increase the awareness of the value of women's documents, and encourage depositing of papers; and the other is to face inwards, to ask about the aim of the collection, its growth, future, problems of acquisition, preservation, dissemination and bibliographic control (Davaz-Mardin, 2000, p. 462). It is interesting to note that many of the other articles on women's libraries appear to not fully engage with either mission that she identifies, in that they often do not locate the article within a wider perspective e.g. women's history,

role of women's documents, nor do they consider internal issues such as collection development or user needs.

Ilett's theoretical perspective on gender and librarianship takes a different approach from much of the literature in that she analyses the effects feminism has had on the profession. She argues that libraries have been influenced by masculine viewpoints, e.g. the Dewey decimal system, (see Chapter 4 Section 4.7 for a discussion of this), and her thesis focuses on exploring how a 'gendered' profession like librarianship has adapted to the demands of feminism. She also considers librarianship within women's libraries, where, following her theoretical standpoint, one would expect to see more evidence of feminist librarianship practices (Ilett, 2003). Her analysis of the connections between feminism and librarianship is an important theoretical development of this field, and has been applied in this thesis. However, although she conducted a survey of three women's libraries in the UK, the choosing of the three organisations is not explained and other existing women's libraries are not mentioned. The discussion surrounding the three chosen libraries focuses primarily within the context of how they operate in the profession and as such, does not provide this thesis with a comparative survey.

Hildenbrand's comparative study of women's libraries in America links the theory behind their foundation directly to the prominence, or otherwise, of women's movements over time. Thus, she argues that the growing consciousness of women during the first and second waves of feminism was also seen in the growing awareness of the importance of women's information, educating women and women's empowerment (Hildenbrand, 1986b).

"women's collections today owe their number, size and vigour to feminism, with its dual commitments to activism and scholarship on behalf of women." (Hildenbrand, 1986b, p. 1)

This connection between feminist theory and feminist practice would suggest that the creation of a women's library or archive in Wales would partially depend upon the current level of feminist awareness and activism in Wales. This idea is expounded in Chapter 6.

2.3.2 *Comparative studies*

An early and important example of a comparative approach to women's libraries is that of Hildenbrand's 1986 edited work *Women's collections: libraries, archives and consciousness*. Several articles cite Hildenbrand's work as important in their own work although they generally refer to her 1996 edited book rather than the earlier work (e.g. Baggs, 2000, p. 40; Kerslake & Moody, 2000a, p. 1; Sturges, 2000, p. 5). As well as noting the origins and fortunes of women's collections, Hildenbrand also profiled a number of different women's collections in America (Hildenbrand, 1986). Although her comparative study provides information about the positions of women's libraries in America, there is no mention of institutions or networks outside of America.

A more global perspective is provided by Greening, formerly an archivist at the Fawcett Library and the Women's Library. Greening was one of the delegates at the first conference on women's information in 1991, and she discusses the type of international networking that has taken place since then as a result of that and subsequent conferences (Greening, 2000).

The mutually supportive professional and personal relationships struck at these first conferences are still active in initiatives such as the European Women's Thesaurus, an IIAV project (Greening, 2000, p. 468)

All kinds of women's resource centres and organisations are represented in this informal association, from radical through academic to United Nations-sponsored non-governmental organisations and national collections, from small one-woman initiatives to multi-staffed, multi-media collections. (Greening, 2000, p. 469)

Interestingly, although her article is also partly about the Women's Library and Information Center in Istanbul, and the following article in the journal is specifically about this library, both articles appear in the journal *Gender and History*, rather than in a librarianship journal. There are three issues to consider as a result: one is that it is

evidence of the multi-disciplinary nature of this topic; the second is that many of the women's libraries focus strongly on historical reasons for their existence and have close connections to women's history; the final important factor to consider is that a researcher has to search a wide range of related disciplines in order to find the literature. This could lead potentially to lack of awareness of developments in the field, and may also lead to the fragmentation of the topic. It also provides supporting evidence for a finding from this thesis, which is that women's libraries have varying degrees of engagement with both librarianship and feminism. It may be difficult to be *fully* engaged with both fields and some libraries may have an inclination towards women's history or feminism, whilst others favour librarianship.

Vriend's comparative study discusses the origins of the *Mapping the World* database, along with theoretical reasoning behind women's libraries (Vriend, 2001). She states that

Women have collected and disseminated information for many years, but it is only in the twentieth century that centers have been set up for the specific purpose of collecting and documenting what has come to be known as women's information, which covers a wide spectrum of material, including cultural, political, and educational data. (Vriend, 2001, n. p.)

She locates the importance of women's information firmly within issues of development, empowerment and equality by referring to the decisions made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The *Mapping the World* database was launched by the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement (IIAV) in 1998 at the international *Know-How Conference on the World of Women's Information* and initially contained details of 162 centres representing 78 countries. Subsequent recognition by UNESCO as to the vital global role of women's information, provided funds to expand the database (Vriend, 2001, n. p.). With external funding the IIAV were able to produce the database in book form (see Cummings, Valk & Van Dam, 1999, *Women's information services and networks: a global sourcebook*) which contains additional essays on international

women's networks and women's groups, and a bibliography. In 2001 the IIAV revised the website and database web interface to improve clarity and usability, and in 2004-5 undertook a complete revision of all the entries (currently at about 400) and hope to produce the newly revised database in CD-ROM format (Vriend, 2001, n. p.).

Originally designed as a tool for networking and cooperation among women's information specialists worldwide, the database has now become a useful resource for researchers and those interested in women's issues. Thus it not only "demonstrates the power and richness of women's collections round the world" but has also "helped to make women's information more accessible and visible" (Vriend, 2001, n. p.). Although Vriend's article does not discuss, compare or analyse the multitude of women's libraries/centres globally (an impossible task), she does highlight the level of global networking and awareness about these institution.

A comprehensive comparative presentation of women's libraries can be found in the proceedings from the *Women, Information and the Future* conference held in America in 1994 published in book format (see Moseley, 1995). Whilst the majority of the papers are descriptive accounts of women's libraries from across the globe (e.g. Australia, Bangladesh, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, and Russia), there is also discussion of women's studies, the practicalities of managing women's libraries, women's thesauri and women and human rights. The combination of such varied papers in one book reveals the multi-disciplinary nature of this topic, and, the similarity of many issues faced by women's libraries and archives across the world.

Proceedings from IFLA's Round Table on Women's Issues (RTWI) provides researchers and practitioners with one other comparative monograph on women's library issues, but this volume is not necessarily concerned with women's libraries *per se*. Instead, it is a selection of articles presented at the RTWI over the years of its existence (1993-2002) and covers issues such as women librarians, library managers, information services for women, women's information needs, library school education

and the information society. Whilst there is unfortunately no index in which to look up terms such as 'women's libraries', some of the articles do cover this topic, but again, they are often descriptive accounts of single institutions. Despite this, the global nature of the proceedings provides an international context to the issue of women's information.

Darter, from the Equal Opportunities Commission library, profiled 10 independent women's institutions in the UK in a descriptive yet comparative article (Darter, 1990). Although the institutions were often small she argued that they "had a valuable, although frequently unpublicised, role in the provision of information on a national level" (Darter, 1990, p. 140). Written 15 years ago, half of the 10 centres that she focused on have now closed: Feminist Audio Books, Feminist Library, Lesbian Archive, Women Artists Slide Library and Women's International Resource Centre. She noted that several had lost their funding, frequently commenting that "it may just be a question of time before it is forced to close" (Darter, 1990, p. 141). Of the Feminist Library, she notes that the loss of its funding in 1988 was a "drastic blow" to the collection, and that "the future does indeed look bleak and a major rescue operation will be needed if this fine resource is not to be lost" (Darter, 1990, p. 141). (The library was to continue for another 14 years.) Her main concerns regarding special women's collections are financial difficulties, non-professionally trained staff and an over-reliance upon volunteers, because, "with the best will in the world this inevitably affects the organisation and the exploitation of their materials" (Darter, 1990, pp. 141-142). These issues are still central today.

Because the future looked bleak for many of the libraries she profiled, Darter discussed the future for such collections. She asked who would collect women's studies material if these libraries were to close? Although collections may develop in colleges where women's studies is offered, she argued that academic libraries do not, as a rule, often collect ephemera or grey literature. Yet this type of material is central to the women's movement and forms the basis of many women's collections (Darter, 1990, p. 142). She

also questioned the access to collections in academic libraries as they may not be open to non-students.

Darter also notes a desire to create or amalgamate lists and databases of the collections of women's libraries (Darter, 1990, pp. 142-143). This was partly achieved by *BiblioFem* (see Section 2.3.4), and has been enhanced by *Genesis*, the virtual mapping of women's collections across the UK which has created a searchable database of women-focused collections in the UK.

2.3.3 *Empirical research*

Blagden has conducted one of the few (published) pieces of empirical research on women's libraries. She conducted a user survey of the Fawcett Library, which she states is:

Britain's main historical research library on all aspects of women in society but it [also] contains much current material. (Blagden, 1985, p. 1)

The Fawcett Library was facing constraints of money, space and staff time in the 1980s and was reviewing its acquisitions policy and needed to know more about the usage of the library (Blagden, 1985, p. 1). She sent postal questionnaires to researchers of women's studies on lists as well as conducting eight interviews with users in the library itself. With a total of 147 replies, her success rate was high at 83% (Blagden, 1985, p. 2).

Her findings are illuminating, and they confirm findings from this thesis and other research, that the Fawcett Library and some of its services were either unknown or underused. For example, whilst 80% of her respondents had heard of the Fawcett Library, 70% of these respondents had never actually visited the library. The reasons given included that it was too far to travel to, or that the researcher felt it was not relevant to their work (Blagden, 1985, pp. 7-8). Although Blagden does not discuss the reasons for this latter feeling, it may be that many women's studies researchers during the mid 1980s were involved in contemporary and/or grassroots work, and did not

perceive the Fawcett Library to have the material they would need, seeing it perhaps mainly as an archive of the suffrage movement. In addition, only 1/3 of the respondents had heard of *BiblioFem*, the combined database of the Fawcett Library and Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) library's holdings (Blagden, 1985, p. 8). Whilst it was mainly other women's libraries or other interested institutions that bought microfiche copies of *BiblioFem*, it could have been assumed that women's studies researchers would have known about this bibliographic tool that could aid their research. For those researchers who did use the library, Blagden found that although the physical conditions were not ideal (they described it as "poky" and "tiny"), the staff were very helpful and friendly² (Blagden, 1985, pp. 11-12). Her conclusions were that although it was a valued specialist library, greater publicity was needed in order to overcome the non-use of the library (Blagden, 1985, p. 12). However, its usage depends, inevitably, heavily on its holdings.

A European-wide survey of 55 women's libraries or equality centres (e.g. the EOC in the UK) had the aim of improving international exchange of information and resources that provide documentation in the field of equal treatment for men and women in the European Community (Kramer, 1993, p. 212). The survey and subsequent EC report, whilst being a rare piece of empirical and comparative research does not appear to have had a wide circulation and no other piece of literature refers to the report or its findings. Kramer found that the major obstacles to increased co-operation between women's libraries included a lack of national focus in some states, lack of sufficient funding, lack of standardized indexing and classifying, lack of computerisation and also language barriers (Kramer, 1993, p. 213). She recommended an European network of national women's centres, better use of inter-library loan schemes, and a European database of collections (Kramer 1993, p. 214). It must be noted that since Kramer's article (and the report it is based upon), there have been several international conferences on women's

² A mystery shopper exercise published in CILIP's *Update* magazine, found the Women's Library to have friendly and helpful staff – unlike the majority of academic libraries visited in the sample (Brockhurst, 2005, p. 25).

information (one of which was held in Europe), an European Women's Thesaurus (Drenthe, 1993), and a global directory of women's libraries (*Mapping the World*) which is run by the IIAV, a women's library in the Netherlands. Thus European-wide initiatives in this discipline could be seen to be improving.

2.3.4 Library management issues

Related to the paucity of published empirical research on women's libraries, there is a corresponding lack of documentation on issues relating to the management of such libraries. This topic includes issues such as user needs surveys (see Blagden above), collection management, professional training, classification schemes and management styles.

An example of a descriptive account of a library management issue is that of Pirie's article on *BiblioFem*. *BiblioFem* was a database of (most of) the holdings of the Fawcett Library and the EOC library and it also provided bibliographic details of material concerning women that had been catalogued by the British Library (from the 1950s onwards) and by the Library of Congress (1968 onwards) (Pirie, 1984, p. 30). Although *BiblioFem* was sold internationally, it was not able to cover its costs sufficiently and was discontinued in 1987 (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 231). Despite *BiblioFem* being an innovative tool for women's studies researchers, Pirie's article is very brief and does not concern itself with any theory or reason why such a bibliographic database was needed.

General management issues of concern to women's libraries were raised by Colmer, writing about the Women's Studies Resource Centre in Australia. She notes that because the Centre cannot afford to employ many staff, it relies on volunteers and staff that might not possess library or archive qualifications. This, she says, has sometimes "hindered the cataloguing" as it has been done by a range of different volunteers and workers leading to inconsistencies and other problems (Colmer, 1994, p. 230). However, the Centre has benefited from this sometimes transitory and temporary source of personnel as various projects such as a women's thesaurus have been undertaken by

local graduates as part of their library courses (Colmer, 1994, p. 231) and which would not have occurred without such help.

In addition to the lack of professionally trained librarians and archivists Colmer also noted hostility from these professions.

Traditionally the Centre has been somewhat isolated from mainstream libraries and resource centres: viewed with suspicion for its employment of non-librarians and its somewhat ad-hoc technical systems. However, the last few years have seen the centre developing stronger links with other libraries... . (Colmer, 1994, p. 229)

This quote is interesting because it suggests that the isolation and disengagement from librarianship was not a result of self-imposed individuality, but because of suspicion from the library profession.

The most detailed example of collection management issues and women's libraries is provided in an extensive article on collection development and the history of the Fawcett Library. By providing a historical perspective, the author (influential in bringing the Fawcett Library to the Polytechnic 1976/77, and Head of Library Services at the City of London Polytechnic until 1987) is able to give reasons for the focus of the library's holdings, and the dilemmas involved in collecting and creating a women's library. Pankhurst explains that much of the material was collected via donations rather than purchase, as well as through international links e.g. the exchange of feminist periodicals (Pankhurst, 1987, pp. 226-227). During the 1970s the library experienced a decline in members, decline in donations and rising costs, leading to a low level of acquisitions and some service cuts (Pankhurst 1987, p. 230). It is interesting to note that the library was experiencing a decline when the second wave of the women's liberation movement was at its zenith. This confirms the view that the library was seen more as an archive, particularly on suffrage and middle-class women, rather than a contemporary resource collecting current material (Ilett, 200, p. 238, 247). However, Doughan, a member of staff at the Fawcett Library, writing three years after Pankhurst argued that "[t]he Fawcett Library is Britain's main historical resource on women and feminism,

and is also a major library of contemporary women's studies" (Doughan, 1990, p. 148).

He further stated that:

the main academic emphasis of the Library is historical and political; however, current material is actively collected, and the political range includes revolutionary radical feminism, the Women's Institute, and the Campaign for Feminine Woman. (Doughan, 1990, p. 148)

This suggests that the staff saw the Library as having a role in the collection of contemporary material, but low usage suggests that potential users did not hold such views.

After the Fawcett Library was acquired by the City of London Polytechnic in 1976/77, one of the first priorities was to "rebuild confidence" in the library (Pankhurst, 1987, p.230). However, by the early 1980s although there was an increased awareness of the Fawcett Library and women's issues which led to increase in usage, library staff "had deliberately refrained from extensive publicity, because there was neither the space nor the staff to accommodate a large readership" (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 231). An increase in feminist literature, an increase in ephemera from the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) combined with a decline in the funds of City of London Polytechnic led to many problems in the 1980s, not least pressures of space and an over-full basement (where the library was housed).

Given the Fawcett Library's primary emphasis on the suffrage movement, Pankhurst was aware that contemporary material was potentially at risk from not being collected. Her summary of the other contemporary women's libraries reveals an attitude at the Fawcett Library that is still visible today (see Chapters 4 and 5) as she dismisses the other women's libraries for various (and mostly valid) reasons. She argued that the Feminist Library was not secure enough, with its absence of institutional affiliation, precarious funding, and loss of professional staff, to offer a permanent home to WLM material, and she questioned its long-term future (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 233). (It is interesting to note that at the time of her article in 1987, although the Feminist Library was in a dip at that point, it survived for another 17 years.) With regard to the EOC

library, she argued that it does not collect ephemera or archives, thus this material still does not have a natural home. (Darter claims that the EOC library did collect ephemera such as newsletters from local women's groups, Darter, 1983; Darter, 1985.) Pankhurst also dismissed the Feminist Archive as it is "merely a room" at the University of Bath, and because the university wanted the room back there was a question over its future. She also drew attention to the fact that it was only open to women, run by volunteers and had no money (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 233).

Her conclusions regarding the other women's libraries led to the suggestion that the Fawcett Library alone should cater for the needs of the feminists of the day. In the light of this, she argues that it must assess user behaviour (e.g. information needs) and look at what issues current feminist researchers are interested in, in order to provide, and collect, the most appropriate material (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 235). (Blagden's users survey on the Feminist Library had been conducted two years previously.) The idea of user needs surveys is not unique to women's libraries, as all libraries should undertake such projects in order to ensure that the needs of their users (and non-users) are being met, and to consider how to improve services to meet users' needs.

Pankhurst's article is interesting not only in terms of her views on collection management, other women's libraries and the geographical scope of the library, but also for the evidence of the idea of it becoming a national library for women. Pankhurst states that:

a notion was developing that the Fawcett Library should aim at becoming the national archive or national library on women – a kind of Women's British Library. (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 235)

Ten years later the library won its Heritage Lottery Fund bid under its (temporary) new name of the National Library for Women. However, whilst aiming at being a national library for women, Pankhurst also highlights a desire for closer cooperation among the other women's libraries and some academic institutions.

A network of women's studies libraries could help to provide complete coverage and could eventually perhaps develop a successor to

BiblioFem in the shape of a union catalogue of material on women in the cooperating libraries. (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 237)

A small number of specialist women's libraries also offer possibilities of collaboration, though ... problems of continuity ... may make a long-term arrangement difficult. (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 237)

There are good possibilities of cooperating with the major women's libraries in other countries. (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 237)

She notes that they were awaiting an investigation of women's studies holdings of other British libraries and academic institutions, and hoped cooperation would be possible to reduce the collection development burden. After my fieldwork at the Women's Library, extensive cooperation between British women's libraries was not immediately obvious, but, the development of *Genesis*, an online bibliographic database of relevant material in various locations across the UK is to be welcomed (see Section 4.7.7 in Chapter 4).

Whilst Pankhurst's article is useful for a number of reasons, it is interesting to note that there is little discussion on the actual value of women's libraries, why they are important, and their position within either librarianship or women's studies in the UK or internationally. As has been outlined before, these omissions are not confined to this one article.

A more recent review of the Fawcett Library's collection was conducted by Greening & Davis-Perkins (both part-time workers at the library at the time). Their survey looked at the conservation and preservation of all the material in order to give a picture of the library's physical state and to estimate the size of various possible conservation projects. They noted that "it has become obvious that rare and old material has suffered from heavy use" (Greening & Davis Perkins, 1995, p. 196).

Another collection development issue is that of separation or integration of material, if the library is part of a larger institution. This is explored by both Moseley and by Voss-Hubbard in relation to two women's libraries at colleges in America (Moseley, 1973; Voss-Hubbard, 1995). The women's collections at both Radcliffe College and Smith

College were started in the 1940s but whereas at Smith's College the women's material is shelved within the main section, at Radcliffe College it is in a separate collection. One of the leading women in women's archives in America in the 1930s and 1940s had subsequently argued for a separate catalogue for the collection at Smith College but to no avail (Voss-Hubbard, 1995, p. 27). Moseley noted that:

a separate listing of women's manuscript collections implies the wish to keep women's records either physically separate or easily distinguishable from those of men. But should women's repositories exist at all? If they should, what should they collect? Should all women's papers go to women's repositories? ... It seems clear that, because of traditional neglect of women's contributions, separate libraries about women are needed now.... (Moseley, 1973, p. 221)

However Moseley also notes the problems and dilemmas associated with a women's library and its material. For example, she questions what should happen to documents by female doctors: should the material go to a women's library, or to a medical library? She argues there are problems with both scenarios, but until all libraries house material on both sexes in equal quantity and scope, she argues it is perhaps better to collate women's material separately (Moseley, 1973, p. 222).

Voss-Hubbard also discusses the merits and disadvantages of both separation and integration. By creating a separate collection, there is the advantage of creating a unique resource with a specific focus, housed together for researchers' convenience (Voss-Hubbard, 1995). There is the parallel danger however, that only those specifically interested in women's issues will use the material and it may become a ghetto. Integration can lead to lead to more people using the collection and it may be used by people outside of women's studies. But, the parallel problem is that through integration there can be a loss of cohesion or sense of a unified collection and less likelihood of serendipitous findings for women's studies researchers. Moseley felt that despite women's libraries being excellent places:

there are many more people who will never appear at a women's library, so it is important that other libraries and archives increase and make known their holdings on women. (Moseley, 1973, p. 222)

Two other important library issues of relevance to women's libraries are those of classification and thesauri.

“Cataloguing and classification schemes have been established by men... and man is used as a generic term, and women are a sub-species” (Lochhead, 1985, p. 11).

Such is the justification for revising traditional classification schemes. Olson provides a deconstructionist critique of information retrieval and classification systems in order to overcome the traditional binary structures inherent within them (Olson, 1997). Olson argues that the process of deconstruction allows space for ‘the other’ (i.e. women), having identified and changed the previous barriers e.g. sexist language and stereotyping. Although she argues that it is important to deconstruct, reverse and replace binaries, the latter is not as clearly examined as the first two objectives in her research. Evidence of replacing traditional systems can be seen in women's classification schemes and in women's thesauri.

Moseley argues that Library of Congress headings are chauvinistic in their design and terminology because women are not accorded equality with men, for example, the use of terms such as ‘women as ...’ or ‘women in...’ where there is no corresponding ‘men as doctors’ or ‘men in medicine’ as it is taken for granted that terms such as ‘doctor’ will apply to men (Moseley, 1973, p. 221). Lochhead provides further evidence of how the use of the term ‘man – conception’ as a subject term renders it meaningless when ‘man’ actually refers to ‘women’ (Lochhead, 1985, p. 11). Lochhead argues that examples of such sexist approaches to classification inhibit the identification and utilisation of relevant material.

There is slightly more research on classification systems and gender bias from America than the UK, where the Library of Congress' subject terms have been amended (Ilett, 2002, p. 35). In America, women's thesauri were developed in 1977 and 1987 (Marshall, 1977; Capek, 1989). In Britain, although Cowley noted in 1984 five women's resource centres and libraries in the UK which deployed their own classification systems (see Section 2.3.9) there is no separate women's thesaurus. In the

Netherlands, frustration with the invisibility and inaccessibility of women's information in regular libraries and thus the importance of special subject indexing systems led to the development of a Dutch women's thesaurus which was produced in 1992. At that time there were "about fifty libraries, archives and resource centres on women" in the Netherlands (Kramer, 1995a, p. 205). Kramer notes how the Dutch women's thesaurus is different from other thesauri in that the standard terms refer to women, and where the terms relate to men a symbol is deployed to indicate this (Kramer, 1995a, p. 208). It has also been adapted by women's libraries in France and Italy (Drenthe, 1993, p. 443) and extended to become a European Women's Thesaurus (Drenthe, 1993).

Despite the development of several women's thesauri, Ilett notes that there is little literature within librarianship of the theory and practice of women's thesauri or classification schemes.

During the 1970s and 1980s, some female librarians, particularly dealing with the multidisciplinary nature of women's studies, tackled this, but often in publications with limited circulation. (Ilett, 2002, p. 35)

Therefore, although there are some women's classification schemes in the UK and America, awareness of them is limited. This is in conjunction with the lack of awareness of women's libraries in general. Ilett also argues that the writings are from

grassroots feminism [which] have described difficulties and possible alternatives, but their impact has been limited to activists within women's information centres, not mainstream librarianship. (Ilett, 2002, p. 35)

Her findings confirm that those working in women's libraries are often not professionally qualified librarians and are not heavily engaged with librarianship. They may therefore not be aware that their development of, quite radical, feminist classification systems could have wider relevance and interest within librarianship.

2.3.5 Histories and descriptive narratives

Two articles from the early 1980s which are similar in the treatment of the libraries they cover and their objectives are prime examples of descriptive narratives of women's

libraries. Both can be seen as ‘profile-raising’ on account of their content and their source of publication. Wahhab describes the Women’s Research and Resource Centre, London (WRRC) (which later became the Feminist Library) in a typical example of a descriptive account of a women’s library, although she does also mention in passing three other existing women’s libraries in the UK at that time (1980). Published in the *Socialist Librarians’ Journal* it is unlikely to have reached a wide audience but may well have brought the existence of the WRRC to the attention of interested socialist librarians.

Likewise, the article by Davies & Walbe in an issue of *Spare Rib* in 1982 will have raised the profile of the four women’s libraries included (Fawcett Library, WRRC, Equal Opportunities Commission and Feminist Archive) among women and feminists. The title of the article (*Women on the shelf: a guide to feminist libraries*) sets out their stance towards these institutions, even though three of the libraries did not use the word feminist in their names, and the authors note that the Fawcett Library is open to men and has male staff (Davies & Walbe, 1982, p. 20). Both authors were workers at the WRRC at the time of writing, and it is interesting to note that although the WRRC had been established in 1975 they state that “many women don’t know yet” what it actually is (Davies & Walbe, 1982, p. 21). Hence perhaps the need for an article in a feminist magazine.

[E]ven many women who are working on or reading about various topics related to women’s history don’t seem to have heard of the Fawcett; it’s really an untapped resource considering what a lot we can learn from our past. (Davies & Walbe, 1982, p. 20)

This lack of awareness was confirmed by Blagden in 1985 (Blagden, 1985). As well as low profiles of the women’s libraries, the authors also note that financial constraints are perennial problems, and with reference to the WRRC they say that “as the financial position is always insecure it’s difficult to foresee the future” (Davies & Walbe, 1982, p. 21). The WRRC was in existence for another 22 years after this quote, but in the end, lack of sufficient finances forced its closure (see Descriptions in Section 3.10 in Chapter 3).

The Fawcett Library is the focus for several articles e.g. Pankhurst, 1987; Doughan, 1990 and Van Gend, 1999, as well as being the focus of a special issue of the *Women's Studies International Forum* in 1987. The articles included: its history and development, funding, and collection development. Richardson's article on the funding of the Fawcett Library highlights how, "in common with other women's organisations, the Fawcett Library is understaffed, under resourced, and constantly looking for money" (Richardson, 1987 p. 299). It was to be a further 10 years before the Fawcett Library won a £4.2 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and even this substantial sum has not eradicated the need for constant fundraising and donation schemes. As will also become apparent in the Findings chapter of this thesis (Chapter 4), Richardson's article highlights the fact that even if a women's library is attached to an university, this does not necessarily guarantee a secure financial future. However, this position is disputed slightly by Posthumus in her article on the IIAV in Amsterdam. She notes that:

women's collections, libraries, archives, and documentation centers generally walk far behind mainstream institutions. When they are independent, they consume a great deal of energy in the struggle for sheer survival. Affiliation with a recognized institution solves some problems because it provides recognition, 'overhead supplies', and the possibility of doing public relations. Most important, institutional affiliation provides funding for collections and for the provision of services to researchers. Women's libraries must recognize that independence is very energy-consuming, while affiliation improves the possibility of developing collections and hiring staff. (Posthumus, 1992, p. 94)

A library that epitomises independence and continued struggle for survival is Glasgow Women's Library. A current member of staff and founder of Glasgow Women's Library wrote an article profiling the library's history, its collections and also, like the Fawcett Library, outlining its future proposals:

The Library co-ordinators are currently making ambitious plans to develop into an appropriately resourced and staffed, more accessible Women's Library; we are also keen to consult with anyone interested in our plans to develop into a national resource. (Patrick, 2000, p. 15)

By writing in the *Scottish Libraries* journal, and by appealing for responses to its proposals, the staff at Glasgow Women's Library can be seen to be engaging, to some extent, with the wider library profession, seeking their opinions on the Library's strategic planning proposals which could have an impact on library provision within Scotland.

As well as specific articles on specific women's libraries, relevant literature can also be found in magazines, newspapers and in journal editorials. For example, in one issue of *Women's History Review*, the editor June Purvis discusses the successful £4.2 million Heritage Lottery Fund grant to London Guildhall University for a new building for the Fawcett Library. She describes the Fawcett Library as "the premier library of women's history in Britain" (Purvis, 1998, n. p.). She states that "[i]t has been a national disgrace that for so long the heritage of one half of humanity in this country has been kept where it is" (that is, in a cramped basement) (Purvis, 1998, n. p.). Other comments in her editorial also hint at her view on this one library as the *only* women's library in Britain e.g. "A National Library for Women – in Britain? It is like a dream come true" and "now we will have a library of our own, complete with conference room, shop and café" (Purvis, 1998, n. p.). In 1998 there were several other women's libraries in Britain, and although it is true that they did not have conference rooms, shops or cafes, reference could have been made to them, in terms of what else is happening in women's archives and history. Despite her historical slant, she referred to a contemporary debate in the national broadsheets where discussion had taken place over what sort of material should be in a women's library, agreeing with another prominent feminist writer (Elaine Showalter) that contemporary sources should also be included in the new National Library for Women (Purvis, 1998, n. p.).

2.3.6 *International perspectives*

International links and cooperation are a particular interest of the IIAV in Amsterdam. Posthumus outlines the history of the IIAV, which was created in 1988 when three organisations merged: the International Archives for the Women's Movement (IAV)

founded 1935; the Information and Documentation Center for the Women's Movement (IDC) founded 1968 and the feminist journal *Lover* founded 1973 (Posthumus, 1992, p. 93). She notes that the merger was necessary because the Ministry of Social Affairs who funded the organisations informed them that either they merged or the three organisations would not get any extra funds. In merging they have reduced expenses (Posthumus, 1992, p. 96), and have perhaps increased their combined profiles, particularly internationally. This can be seen in their hosting of, and continued support for, a (roving) quad-annual conference on women's information and also the creation of an international directory of women's libraries (*Mapping the World* database) and a European Women's Thesaurus, (see Drenthe, 1993 and Kramer, 1995).

Several articles originating from European women's libraries focus on, or mention, networking and cooperation. For example Hofmann-Weinberger & Wille discuss the Austrian Network of Women's Studies Information and Documentation Centre and its various networking and collaborative projects (Hofmann-Weinberger & Wille, 1994); Drenthe discusses the theory, origins and foundation of the Dutch Women's Thesaurus which was launched in 1992 (Drenthe, 1993); and Holst examines KVINFO, the Danish Centre for Information on Women and Gender and its international co-operation with women's centres in other Nordic countries, particularly the Nordic Virtual Library for Women's Studies and Gender Research (Holst, 2002).

Regional cooperation and international conferences on women's libraries highlight the global nature of this field. An email mailing list (KNOWHOWCONF@NIC.SURFNET.NL) generated out of the quad-annual conference on women's information and libraries is one example of practitioners engaging with each other across the world, but this practical approach does not seem to be translated into published literature based on empirical international research.

2.3.7 *Women's archives and women's history*

Many women's libraries are based on important archival collections, and the field of women's libraries is closely connected to women's history. The neglect of women in formal written history is one of the key reasons for researching women's lives using primary resources (Beddoe, 1998; Rowbotham, 1973; Zangrando, 1973). It is now accepted that until the last few decades, women were rarely included in histories of society, unless they were particularly exceptional or unusual (Zangrando, 1973, p. 205). Zangrando notes that in the *Oxford History of the American People* by Samuel Eliot Morison, the women's suffrage movement in America was dealt with in two sentences. In comparison, the prohibition movement was given three pages (Zangrando, 1973, p. 205). This lack of space given to women in monographs and the lack of women's papers in manuscript repositories contributes towards women's invisibility, as few libraries or archive institutions focus attention on acquiring women-focused material (Moseley, 1973, p. 215). Early recognition of this gap in documented history led to various campaigns for women's archives centres in America, during the 1930s and 1940s and two articles discuss the development of women's archives in America (Moseley, 1973; Voss-Hubbard, 1995). The early women's collections at Radcliffe College is now known as the Arthur & Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America and has an international reputation (and was where Moseley was curator).

Whilst Voss-Hubbard's article is detailed and informative about the origins of the women's archive movement in America, it is perhaps a little limited in that it discusses only two college collections, and does not relate events in America to collections or developments elsewhere. Several countries in Europe had already established women's libraries and archives by the 1940s, but these are not mentioned.

A booklet concerned with the need for individual women and women's groups to preserve their archives not only outlines the reasons why women's documents are important but also provides a practical guide for women's organisations on how to

manage their archives. The booklet (from New Zealand) *Preserving ourstory: keeping the archives of women's organisations* (Berzines, 1995, p. 377-378) was written in order to prevent the loss of important archives in the future, after it was discovered that the archives of women's suffrage groups from pre-1900 New Zealand had been permanently lost. As well as providing information on how to preserve and manage archives, the booklet also encourages depositing material in suitable repositories if keeping the archives within the organisation is not possible or practical. This guide, although short, would be useful for many women's groups across the world and it is an idea that women's archives and libraries in the UK could consider to help increase awareness about the importance of preserving women's documents in suitable repositories.

2.3.8 Women and public libraries

There is an extensive amount of literature on women and librarianship as a profession, including stereotypes of female librarians, the feminisation of the profession, and status and pay (Baum, 1992, Goetsch & Watstein, 1993; Harris, 1992; Kerslake, 2002; Layzell Ward, 1966) but this attention does not generally extend to women's libraries themselves. A prime example is a recent monograph edited by Kerslake & Moody entitled *Gendering Library History* (and which is proceedings from a conference of the same name held in May 1999 in the UK). The papers focus primarily on women in the profession and women as users of libraries. Although a few leading female librarians from the past are profiled, Vera Douie who was librarian at the Fawcett Library from 1926 until 1967 is not mentioned in any articles. Neither is there any mention of any women's libraries or archives in the articles or in the index. This confirms my findings that there appears to be a slight disengagement between librarianship and women's libraries. Despite an awareness of the importance of the women's liberation movement in the 1970s, it has previously been found that:

the literature of librarianship contains limited references, outside the collection building area, to library service to women and on women-related issues. (Cassell & Weibel, 1980, p. 70)

Turock, for example, questioned what public libraries in the USA were doing in terms of providing information for women (Turock, 1975). She profiled one particular service that had been implemented in New Jersey where small grants were offered for the setting up of women's information centres. Turock's article, despite being primarily a descriptive account, is interesting for two reasons. One is that it was written during an active period for women's issues and it would thus be intriguing to see if such a service was demanded and could be successfully initiated today. The second issue is that it offers a potential option for Wales (and other countries) that do not have the infrastructure, resources or impetus to establish women's libraries as independent organisations, but could look to enhancing their provision within established information services such as public libraries.

It is also interesting to note that at the turn of the twentieth century in the UK, many public (free) libraries provided a 'women's reading room', although services were not particularly tailored to their needs, other than having a separate area (Moore, 2000a, p. 101). Moore also notes that the provision of separate areas was a contentious issue, thus highlighting the fact that the debate surrounding integration or separation has a long history (Moore, 2000a, pp. 101-102).

Other research has found that women "did not look immediately to the library, an institution of the patriarchy, as a source for information, help, or even as a meeting place" (Neel & Broidy, 1982, p. 295). This is confirmed by much of the literature on women's information needs (see Section 2.4.6.1 below). It has been argued that during the 1980s many feminist groups did not see the public library as a potential source of information. This is due to a variety of reasons, such as activists preferring their own networks; much of the relevant material being outside the traditional 'published-material' spheres, e.g. by small women's presses that did not or could not deliver to libraries; the difficulty of keeping a collection current given the pace of output of material; and the possibly controversial nature of some of the material (Cassell &

Weibel, 1980, p. 72). Thus, developing women's services within a public library may still not meet women's information needs.

2.3.9 *Women's studies and women's libraries*

In several countries women's libraries have developed in conjunction with the development of women's studies as an academic discipline (Lee, 2002) and several academic institutions offering women's studies have created comprehensive resource centres (e.g. at Lancaster University, University College Dublin and York University). A frequent debate within the field of women's studies is that of separation or integration (see Bowles & Klein, 1983; Gillis & Munford, 2003; Kemp & Squires, 1997c). In terms of the library collection, there are arguments for maintaining a separate collection of women's studies material, as well as for integrating the material like any other subject (see Lee, 2002; Moseley, 1973; Voss-Hubbard, 1995). An argument in favour of placing the material together is because many people find books and information through browsing; if the material on women's issues is scattered across a collection, a typical user is less likely to find the relevant material (Lochhead, 1985, p. 14). But Searing notes that if a special collection for women's studies is maintained it may mean book buyers in other sections are free not to select any books by or about women, and this then may distort the general collection (Searing, 1986, p. 153). Indeed, this point was reinforced by an employee of the British Library who argued in one article that not only was the selection of material in women's studies not straightforward due to its interdisciplinary nature, but also clear statements were needed from other relevant libraries so to not duplicate material. If followed, this approach could lead to library specialisation, greater co-operation for inter-library loans and for the development of synchronised computer catalogues (Bloomfield, 1990, p. 137). But the counter argument is that separation of stock could lead to fragmentation and marginalisation – a constant worry of feminists and women's studies scholars (Lee, 2002, p. 348). Searing argues that despite collection development problems, many women often want a “women's place/space” (Searing, 1986, p. 153).

Researchers in women's studies face a variety of problems, primarily because of the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, the rapid growth in the literature and the variety of outputs for research i.e. specialist women's magazines and journals and mainstream outlets (Carter & Ritchie, 1990, p. 3). This situation could be used to the advantage of women's libraries in promoting their resources as definitive collections of material in one place, but this does not appear to occur.

Cowley notes the interdisciplinary nature of women's studies and the relative lack of awareness of what material is available, thus the justification for her guide to information sources for women's studies in the UK (Cowley, 1984). The guide encompasses a directory of women's organisations, groups and women's resource centres in the UK, with a section on how to establish and maintain a women's resource centre along with a bibliography of relevant material. The guide discusses selection of material, classification, cataloguing and indexing, accessibility, order, reference or lending decisions, exploitation of material and dealing with enquiries. She provides an illuminating approach to the management of women's libraries, suggesting women's libraries could disregard some standard library practices, if they so desired.

One pleasure of not being a professional in a certain field is that one can break the rules without feeling that one's erstwhile tutor is frowning disapproval over one's shoulder. And a refreshing aspect of the women's movement is that its protagonists are always ready to question received ideas. However, there are good reasons for some of the processes carried out in professionally-organised resource centres... . I do not believe that certain library customs are always correct and any other approaches are bound to be wrong. (Cowley, 1984, p. 81)

As will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5, women's libraries often do not adhere to several formal library customs.

2.3.9.1 Women's studies courses

The nature of women's studies courses in the last decade has seen a shift towards 'gender studies', which also includes masculinities and studies on men. This is another cause for debate among feminists. It is difficult to state accurately how many women's

studies and gender studies courses there are at undergraduate and postgraduate level. One reason for this is that some of the online course databases do not list either women's studies or gender studies as search options, and when using keywords, the results bring up courses where gender is mentioned in perhaps only one option module on a course (see the websites of Prospects, the British Council, and UCAS -Universities and Colleges Admissions Services). Lists of courses in women's studies, gender studies and women's history are provided on some women's websites such as the Institute for Feminist Theory and Research, the Women's History Network and Genesis. Combining all this data, creates a rather confusing mass of conflicting figures. However, it seems that there are about 20-25 higher educational establishments offering postgraduate qualifications in women's studies and gender studies, and that 18 of these institutions offer these courses as single subjects. Of these 18, about 10 are for women's studies courses. This suggests that whilst gender studies now exists as a subject, there is still provision for women's studies. At undergraduate level, there are about five to 10 institutions that offer gender studies or women's studies, with most of these courses being combined subjects. There are about 20 institutions offering women's history at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, with about 10 of these offering the course as single subject.

Griffin and Hanmer's recent research states that there were 47 women's studies courses in the UK in 1993, thus we can see that there has been a decrease in provision (Griffin & Hanmer, 2001, p. 24). Popularity of the courses is harder to trace. It is interesting to note that some of the staff in the women's libraries felt that user numbers in women's libraries had fallen because of the loss of women's studies courses. Whilst not all the courses have been lost, there are fewer courses now than 10 years ago. But, one of the women's libraries is now actively involved with such a course. The Women's Library (in conjunction with its parent organisation, the London Metropolitan University) now offer a MA in Modern British Women's History.

2.3.10 Women, information and development

Many of the women's libraries in less developed countries are connected to ideas of development, personal empowerment and democracy. Wang provides a clear argument for the need to adopt a gender-sensitive approach to information provision in order to achieve an egalitarian civic society (Wang, 1999, p. 2). Within the context of South Africa she asserts that by targeting rural women in terms of information provision, the whole of society will benefit (Wang, 1999, p. 2), in part due to the 'trickle-down' effect of information passing through a family via the women. She argues therefore that development programmes need to pay more attention to information resources to enable women to participate more if the development is to be successful (Wang, 1999, p. 2). She believes that:

the ability to access and use information is a cornerstone of participatory democracy and a way to contribute to the realisation of a just, sustainable social order for all citizens. (Wang, 1999, p. 7)

Wang's position supports earlier work in this area by Vyas. Vyas argued that:

"the women's movement and those concerned with women and development have long recognised that information is a means of empowerment for women" (Vyas, 1993, p. 149).

In addition to women's libraries or centres, Valk, Van Dam & Cummings see the role of networking as crucial for ensuring successful development and women's empowerment.

Informal social networks and togetherness among women have been approved forms of organization since time immemorial. Women everywhere have formed themselves formally and informally into networks to demand services and promote networks of survival and mutual help to accomplish their reproductive and productive roles. (Valk, Van Dam & Cummings, 1999, p. 26)

They argue that networking is an important means of redistributing power and is an important tool for women, indeed often one of the few tools freely available to them (Valk, Van Dam & Cummings, 1999, pp. 26-27). As much of the literature on women's information needs shows, women across the world generally rely on networks and informal sources of information, thus showing the importance of networks and women's groups (see Section 2.4.6.1 below).

2.3.11 Summary of the women's libraries literature

We have seen from the preceding discussion that the literature on women's libraries is diverse in nature, content, style and source of publication. The diversity represents the international coverage of women's libraries, highlighting that this topic is of concern to a variety of library and archive professionals across the world. Despite the diversity, there are some interesting parallels. One is the importance of women's history and preserving women's documents as reasons for establishing women's libraries, along with the concern for women's rights universally. These theoretical issues behind women's libraries are joined by the desire for a women's space, for information specifically for and about women. This relates particularly to notions of separatism and being outside the mainstream. However, there are continuous debates about the value of separation and integration, with valid arguments for both approaches. The literature on women's libraries also discusses various library management issues such as feminist classification systems, collection development and user needs. However, this element is perhaps somewhat less developed than might have been expected, highlighting some disengagement between librarianship and women's libraries. Surprisingly also, given that women's libraries aim to meet the varied information needs of women, there is little linkage between the literature on women's libraries and the related field of women's information needs.

2.4 Women's information needs

2.4.1 Information needs as a research area

What are information needs? Information is often sought in order to make sense of a situation, to take control or to make decisions about choices (Davies & Bath, 2002, p. 303). Everybody has 'information needs', defined by Maurice Line as "what an individual ought to have for his [sic] work, his research, his edification etc." (quoted in Hewins, 1990, p. 149). Thus, a woman's information needs could cover equal opportunities information, health information or educational information. How the

information need is translated into information seeking, and the processes of finding the information are encompassed by the term information seeking behaviour.

2.4.2 *Models and theories*

Information needs as a research area has a long history, which Wilson dates back to 1948 and the Royal Society Scientific Information Conference (Wilson, 1981, p. 5). During the following 50-60 years, many different models and theories of information seeking, information needs and information behaviour have been developed e.g. by Chatman, Dervin, Ellis and Kuhlthau. These models provide a variety of frameworks within which other researchers can conduct their own research. Interestingly, the majority of studies on women's information needs do not explicitly place their research within any of the models of information seeking. Whether this is because the researchers do not feel the models offer valid relevant frameworks for their work, or because they do not see the need to place their work within a model of information seeking, is unclear.

Despite the lack of theoretical frameworks, the literature on women's information needs is consistent in its rigorous application of data collection methods. Many studies use traditional methodologies for their data collection, principally questionnaires and interview schedules. These tools are frequently deployed within a qualitative framework. Adopting a qualitative approach to investigate information needs may be “particularly appropriate to the study of the needs underlying information-seeking behaviour” as it is concerned with understanding humans (Wilson, 1981, p. 11), and seeks an understanding of behaviour within contexts (Westbrook, 1994, p. 242). Thus, focusing on the individual, their words and a broad context can be seen as central to understanding their information needs, as opposed to collecting numeric data for statistical analysis, which, whilst valid and useful, may not illuminate the specific concerns of the people involved.

Pettigrew, Fidel & Bruce conclude their recent review of information studies by arguing that the challenge for research in this field is to “provide concrete guidance for systems design” (2001, p. 68) i.e. to take the findings back into the field of librarianship or information provision so that improvements can be made to the systems that people use to find information. This finding was not new: ten years earlier Hewins had noted that some of the literature focused on the end-user, whilst other work looked at the information systems in libraries and how these can be improved to help the information needs of users but that not all studies went as far as making recommendations of how information provision can be adapted (Hewins, 1990, p. 148). All of this confirms my findings from the literature review of the two disciplines of women’s libraries and women’s information needs in that there appears to be little overlap between the different fields, with recommendations from one context not being applied or adopted by the other.

2.4.3 What are women’s information needs?

To serve a population group effectively, information workers must understand its information needs and its information-seeking habits. ... The role of research in establishing the information needs of women cannot be overemphasized. (Mbambo, 1995, p. 47)

Women not only need information for themselves, but they are often also the information providers for the whole family (United Nations, 2000, p. xiv) which can create a wider range of information needs. Women’s information needs can cover a wide spectrum of issues e.g. issues of employment, lifelong learning, reproductive rights and divorce³.

The working women needs [sic] constant updating of their knowledge on new changes in order to demonstrate their skill, ability, leadership qualities, job efficiency, as well as knowledge on their rights, duties and limitations. This could be possible through continuous reading,

³ In the UK more women file for divorce than men. In 2004 69% of divorces were granted to the woman in England and Wales. The most frequent reason for which divorce was granted to a woman was the unreasonable behaviour of her husband (National Statistics, 2005, n. p.).

adequate training, education and effective library facilities to support these information needs. (Panigrahi, 1998, p. 111)

However, for various social, economic and cultural reasons⁴, they may often lack the time and skills to search for the information. It is therefore valid to look at their information needs and information behaviour, and how women's libraries or resources centres may be one way of meeting those information needs.

Some consider that women's information needs are different in extent and nature to men's information needs (see United Nations, 2000). Some women need information in order to give them a voice, to strengthen their position in society, to empower them and to keep women's history alive (Cummings, Valk and van Dam, 1999, p. 15). UNESCO recognised the need for a "gender-sensitive approach to information provision" (Wang, 1999, p. 2). Wang argues that the success of rural development depends upon the involvement and 'capacity building' of women (Wang, 1999, p. 6). This is confirmed by the United Nations who found that the education of women is central for improving the health and education of the family unit (United Nations, 2000, p. xiv). That women are central to development and social progress was also revealed by an international online conference looking at information access for rural women organised by WOUGNET (Women Of UGanda NETwork). They found that ICT empowers women, and that women are central to the success of development programmes (WOUGNET, 2002, n. p.). Women's information needs are therefore important not only on local, social and economic levels, but also at international and strategic policy making levels.

And yet, despite women forming half the world's population,

"analysis of and attention to women's issues and needs both as library users and library workers lags far behind our majority representation."
(Parikh & Broidy, 1982, p. 295)

⁴ Such as lower literacy rates, fewer qualifications or unequal economic conditions – see statistics in Section 1.6 in Chapter 1.

Even though Parikh & Broidy were writing 20 years ago, their findings are still relevant today. For example, Kramarae & Spender note that “the provision of library collections and services to Women’s Studies programs deserves better documentation and analysis” (Kramarae & Spender, 1992, p. 231) and Healy notes that “the thirst for information on and collected by or shared with other women is great” (Healy, 1996, p. 34). Within the UK, the Government recognises that “[w]omen are the key users of health and education services” (Women and Equality Unit, 2001, p. 5) and recognises that if it wishes to improve the delivery of public services, it has to consider the needs of women when redesigning these services. Its report *Better services - better working lives: how health and education services are delivering for women* (Woman and Equality Unit, 2001) provides case study examples of where women’s needs are addressed directly and is an example of the benefits of changes in policies.

2.4.4 Research on women’s information needs

Despite international recognition of the importance of women’s information needs, recent literature on women’s information needs notes that “there are few studies on women’s information needs” or of women’s user studies in libraries (King, 1995, p. 179; Marcella, 2001, pp. 492-493). King argues that women often form the majority of library users and argues that their information needs have been neglected.

The perception that this is a neglected area may be due to the diversity in focus and international scope of the literature on women’s information needs. The research tends to be geographically focused and relate to specific groups of women. When presented as a list (see below), the range and amount of research into women’s information needs could in fact be seen as fairly substantial. It includes (amongst others) (in broadly chronological order):

- information needs of battered women (Harris, 1988; Harris and Dewdney, 1991; Harris et al. 2001; Dunne, 2002)

- community information needs of urban black women in Pretoria, South Africa (Fairer-Wessels, 1990)
- information needs of older women (Chatman, 1991)
- information needs of rural women in Nigeria (Nwagha, 1992) and information needs of women in agriculture in Nigeria (Oladokun, 1994)
- information needs of women with multiple sclerosis (Baker, 1996)
- how rural women communicate in Kenya (Mutua, 1997)
- health information seeking by older black African women in America (Gollop, 1997)
- information access by interdisciplinary women's studies scholars (Westbrook, 1997)
- information use by women in Rourkela, India (Panigrahi, 1998)
- information needs of lesbians (Whitt, 1993; Stenback & Schrader, 1999)
- information needs of rural women in Tanzania (Kiondo, 1999)
- information needs of women in small businesses in Botswana (Mchombu, 2000)
- the state of gender information in Botswana (Rathapo, 2000)
- information needs of women with breast cancer (Brown et al, 2000; Rees & Bath, 2000; Chalmers et al, 2001)
- European Union information needs among women in Scotland (Marcella, 2001)
- information provision to women in rural Kenya (Mutua-Kombo, 2001).
- information needs of women artists in Wales (Tyler, 2002a)
- health information needs of Somalian women in the UK (Davies & Bath, 2002)
- use of women's groups as sources of information in rural Botswana (Mooko, 2002)
- information seeking by women expecting, and with, twins (McKenzie, 2003)
- information needs of female police officers in vice work (Baker, 2004)

This diverse body of research reveals the inter-disciplinary approach to women's information needs, and the international context. What is also evident from most of

these studies is that the women under focus are often in a minority group already, marginalised socially, economically or health-wise. As the primary focus of this thesis is not women's information needs *per se*, the above literature will not be analysed in relation to information needs models and theories. Rather, broad summaries will be made, focusing briefly on the methods, the key findings of the literature, and the relevance of the findings for women's libraries.

2.4.5 Findings from the literature - methods

Many of the research studies into women's information needs have used interviews as a means of data collection, either face to face or by telephone (e.g. Harris, 1988; Harris & Dewdney, 1991). The numbers interviewed have ranged from 10 women (Stenback & Schrader, 1999) to 40 (Harris, 1988; Mchumbu, 2000), 80 (Fairer-Wessels, 1990), 543 (Harris & Dewdney, 1991) and 773 (Kiondo, 1999, p. 20). Whilst interviews have tended to be favoured in the recent past by researchers within the women's studies discipline, some female researches have noted problems with this method (see Oakley, 1981). (For a complete discussion on methodologies and feminist research see Chapter 3.)

The next most popular research method in the field of women's information needs is use of a questionnaire. Again, the total number of women surveyed varies from 100 replies (Panigrahi, 1998) to 141 (Whitt, 1993), 179 (Marcella, 2001) and 193 (Oladokun, 1994). A few studies made use of the time-line approach or critical incident e.g. Stenback & Schrader, 1999; Harris 1988, whilst one study employs the Delphi technique (Westbrook, 1997).

The similarity in research design among the various studies facilitates greater comparisons between the research, and also provides continuity and possibilities for replication of similar studies in different contexts.

2.4.6 Findings from the literature – results

2.4.6.1 Preference for informal sources

Much of the research concurs with the finding that women generally prefer to seek information through informal channels or from informal sources such as friends, rather than from formal sources such as an agency, library or official documentation. For example, one study of 105 women who had suffered from domestic abuse found that “only one woman specifically mentioned visiting a library for assistance in coping with abuse” (Harris et al., 2001, p. 135).

Kiondo’s research into the information needs of rural women in Tanzania found that “friends and relatives are the prime source of information for the majority of respondents” (Kiondo, 1999, p. 22) but she also found that there is also a “problem of lack of access to information by the majority of rural women in most developing countries” (Kiondo, 1999, p. 18). In rural Kenya the same preference for using informal sources was found (Mutua-Kombo 2001, p. 194) and also in urban Pretoria, South Africa (Fairer-Wessels, 1987, p. 54) and in an industrial town in Eastern India (Panigrahi, 1998, p. 115).

The preference for seeking information through friends and informal sources has been confirmed through an action research project with African-American women in the USA. Bishop et al found that women often act as “intermediaries, looking for information on the Web that they then pass on to a friend or relative” (Bishop et al, 2000, n. p.). This does not just apply to the Internet, but is true for many methods of finding information.

Nwagha explored the information gap between rural and urban areas of Nigeria (Nwagha, 1992). She found that the main source of information for the women was via radio or community leaders and friends (Nwagha, 1992, pp. 78-79). This confirms the oral tradition of passing on information in Africa (Nwagha, 1992, p. 80). Mooko found

that although women were aware of women's groups, they tended to use informal networks to find information (Mooko, 2002, p. 110).

A similar finding of preference for informal sources of information was found by Oladokun who conducted research regarding women in agriculture in Nigeria. Although no respondents stated that they visited an information centre to find agricultural information, Oladokun recommends establishing rural information centres to improve the distribution of agricultural information (Oladokun, 1994, p. 322). As many rural women may have very low literacy levels and are less likely to have spare time (since they are responsible for the production of food – growing and processing – for the family, whilst the men either migrate to the cities and send money home, or grow cash crops for export, Nwagha, 1992, p. 76) rural information centres may not meet the needs of the rural women and do not take into account the oral tradition and low literacy among women in rural areas of Africa. (According to the IIAV's *Mapping the World* database, Nigeria currently has eight women's resource centres, IIAV, 2005, n. p.).

2.4.6.2 *Mis-match between services provided and services sought*

Combined with the finding of a preference for informal information sources, much of the literature also concurs in there being problems with existing information services. Frequently there is an information gap between what is sought or needed by women, what is actually provided and what is accessed. For example, in examining the information seeking behaviour of women in Ontario, Canada who have experienced domestic abuse, it was found that there was a mis-match between where people thought women might go to seek information and help, and what help was actually available (Harris & Dewdney, 1991, p. 409). The authors concluded that there was a gap between expectations and actual services, and that there should be greater communication and co-ordination of community information.

Mutua-Kombo looked at what factors affected the provision of information to women and found that the manner in which the information was disseminated, and by whom, played a crucial role in whether the information was communicated effectively. For example, many women did not trust government agencies and felt that they censored information (Mutua-Kombo, 2001, p. 194). Furthermore, many of the information providers were male and were seen as having little or no understanding of women's information and communication needs. Other cultural issues, such as women's preference for informal networks, their busy working lives and the predominance of the English language in the media all contributed towards creating a situation of poor communication and information flow (Mutua-Kombo, 2001, pp. 194-5). To counter this Mutua-Kombo suggested using small women-only community groups, village committees and other informal networks for improved information flow (Mutua-Kombo, 2001, pp. 195-6).

Nwagha identified an "information gap between the urban and rural areas" (of Nigeria) where women in the rural areas were significantly lacking in information compared with women in the urban areas (Nwagha, 1992, p. 77). Her findings also highlighted a potential gap, or mis-match of information in rural Nigeria as most of the agricultural information is disseminated via hardcopy documents and libraries, yet most women sought information via informal channels e.g. friends or local networks. In Tanzania Kiondo interviewed information providers as well as rural women (the recipients of information) and highlighted the discrepancy between channels of information dissemination and channels for information seeking (Kiondo, 1999).

Mchombu's research into the information needs of women running small businesses in Botswana found a similar discrepancy. Whilst the women noted that they got most of their business information through informal channels or extension workers, staff at business institutions which provide information tended to disseminate their information through workshops and seminars (Mchombu, 2000, p. 55). Thus, a "communication gap exists between women and institutions that offer support to women" (Mchombu, 2000,

p. 55). To overcome this problem, Mchombu recommended establishing an information service for businesswomen (Mchombu, 2000, p. 67), although this could be seen as perpetuating the gap between information provision and how information is accessed.

Furthermore, not only might there be an information gap between information provider and information seeker, the information provided might not be adequate or appropriate. For example, Whitt's study of lesbians in North Carolina, USA found there was generally a low level of satisfaction with the services provided to lesbians in public libraries, and concern regarding out-dated material, meagre collections, and judgemental and prejudiced staff (Whitt, 1993, p. 278, 283, 286). She therefore made recommendations for public libraries to improve their services to such communities. A lesbian librarian's group in the UK in the 1980s also found poor support and lack of information for lesbians in public libraries (Rolph, 2000).

In her study of women's reading habits and information seeking behaviour in a steel town in Eastern India, Panigrahi highlighted suggestions to help meet women's information needs. One recommendation was that all major companies should have a library, but also, that there should be a women's library in the city (Panigrahi, 1998, p. 117). However, given that many women, across the world, tend to seek information through informal channels, it is reasonable to question the role, objectives and potential use of such an institution.

2.4.7 Summary of findings from women's information needs literature

It is possible to conclude that despite the large variety in types of research, groups of women studied and geographical settings, there are common findings with regard to how women find information and further, what approaches might be suitable to improve their access to information. Much of the literature concludes that women prefer to seek information through informal channels, through their own networks and groups. In addition, many of the recommendations are to improve and enhance existing community or local information services. It is also possible to see a potential

‘information gap’ between the dissemination of information through formal channels (e.g. printed documents, libraries, agencies), and between the sources women generally utilise in order to find information. The international examples from countries in Africa and Asia are just as relevant to my research as those from the Western world: despite the differences in women and situations, the information needs of women across the globe appear to be similar.

2.5 The situation in Wales

2.5.1 Empirical research

As may be expected, there is little research in the field of women’s libraries and women’s information needs in Wales. A useful early document showing the extent of women’s groups and women’s resource centres in Wales is the *Wales Women’s Directory* produced in 1984 by the Bangor branch of Women’s Enterprise Bureau; a group set up to provide information for women on establishing their own businesses. The impetus behind the directory was to facilitate networking and to help women in business (particularly self-employed women) in Wales and

“[h]aving found it difficult to track down women’s organisations and businesses in Wales, we realised that a directory containing this information would in itself be a useful publication.” (Women’s Enterprise Bureau, 1984, p. 2)

From the entries it is possible to see that there is evidence of Welsh-language involvement with some entries being bilingual (entries were reproduced in the manner in which they were received). Although there are still organisations concerned with self-employment and women in Wales (e.g. the Women’s Enterprise Wales project of Chwarae Teg) there have unfortunately been no subsequent editions of the directory. Evidence from the interviews in Wales for this thesis found that many of the women interviewed would welcome better networking and sharing of knowledge, and the idea of a directory was also welcomed (see Chapters 4 and 5).

The booklet contains details of three women's centres in Wales at that time (1984): Bangor, Cardiff and Swansea. There were also 17 Women's Aid groups across Wales, some of which maintained small information resource centres. From these and other entries it is possible to develop an appreciation for the level of engagement with feminism and the women's liberation movement in Wales in the 1980s.

A more recent and in-depth survey was conducted thirteen years later, but this time geared towards academics, researchers and those interested in the women's movement in Wales. The *Guide to Sources for the Women's Liberation Movement in South Wales* was produced in 1997 by South Wales Feminist History Project and edited by two women currently involved with AMC/WAW (Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales): Avril Rolph and Ursula Masson. This three-volume guide is a useful directory of material pertaining to the WLM in South Wales. Divided into Events, Media and Collections, each volume has detailed entries, including extracts from the material so it is possible to evaluate the contents, before perhaps seeking the original document. The authors took the decision to do more than just list items, as they felt that because much of the material is in private hands and thus inaccessible to researchers, providing very detailed summaries would arouse interest and facilitate research. They note however, that the *Guide* is not definitive and is the result of only one year of research. It would therefore be useful for researchers if the project could be extended to include North and Mid Wales. A related component of the research project was a series of oral history interviews with women who were involved with the WLM in South Wales. These interviews have been transcribed and semi-indexed but are not available publicly. This type of work is important because although the WLM is a fairly recent movement, much of the history about it is in danger of being lost, particularly as much of the information exists either in private collections or as ephemera which frequently is not collected by libraries.

Women's history in Wales was the focus of the annual conference of Llafur: Society for Welsh Labour History in 1983 (Beddoe, 1996, p. 56). Despite this achievement, Beddoe

notes that it is still hard to find evidence of women's history outside of traditional history journals, independent film companies, or small feminist presses (Beddoe, 1996, p. 59) and thus women's history in Wales still "inhabit[s] the fringes" (Beddoe, 1996, p.59). A decade earlier Beddoe had also stated that "Welsh women are culturally invisible" (Beddoe, 1986, p. 227). In some respects it could be argued that they still inhabit a low profile in history and culture, despite their involvement in all circles of social, economic and political life.

2.5.2 Information needs research

There have been very few investigations of information needs within a Welsh context. One piece of recent research was an investigation into whether there was a need for a visual arts magazine for Wales which was commissioned by the Arts Council of Wales. Hourahane found that only a few respondents indicated that they used the Internet, or used online arts sites (Hourahane, 2001, n. p., Section 3.3.3) but that "there is a great desire for a vehicle for networking and communication" (Hourahane, 2001, n. p., Section 8.1). Her research was not investigating information needs along gender lines, but it is significant that among a group of people brought together by type, informal networking is again seen as being vitally important for the dissemination of information.

This finding was confirmed by my earlier research into women artists' information needs in Wales. I used a postal questionnaire to contact women who had attended a conference for women artists in Wales. The research investigated what information key arts organisations in Wales provided to artists, and how such information is disseminated as well as the information needs of the women themselves (Tyler, 2002a, p. vii). I found that many women artists in Wales felt socially and culturally isolated, often lacking the necessary 'know-how' to find relevant information that would help them with their artwork (Tyler, 2002a, p. vii). Further, they tended to use informal networks in order to find information, such as social groups or word of mouth, but, much of the information was disseminated via the Internet. Most of the women also

noted that time pressures often prevented them from accessing the information they needed, and few of them used the Internet as a source of information (Tyler, 2002a, p. 48). This mis-match between information dissemination and accessing information is confirmed by much of the other literature and is a cause for some concern.

2.5.3 Monographs and articles

Women in Wales have been the focus of several monographs since the mid 1980s, particularly since the rise in women's history and women's studies. For example, *Our mother's land: chapters in Welsh women's history 1830-1939* (John, 1991), and the second volume *Our sister's land: the changing identities of women in Wales* (Aaron et al, 1994). However, these books are historical in nature and cover a wide range of topics, none of which relate to information needs. Dee & Keineg's 1987 book *Women in Wales: A documentary of our recent history* profiles a range of women's activities and experiences in Wales in the 1980s e.g. women and publishing, and inspired a similar book to be produced focusing on Scotland (Henderson & Mackay, 1990, *Grit and diamonds: Women in Scotland making history 1980-1990*). When used in conjunction with the previously mentioned directories and guides, these sources provide useful documentary evidence of women in women's issues in Wales.

Despite social and cultural achievements, women in Wales are not always fully equal with men. For example, in a recent book entitled *Wales Today*, only seven out of 25 contributors were female, and only one chapter specifically focused on women (Rees, 1999). Furthermore, this chapter was one of the last four chapters, along with one on black issues and two general all-Wales chapters. Should we conclude therefore that women and black issues are less important, to be put after all other considerations?

A less academic (self published and containing no footnotes or references) monograph on women in Wales is by Draisey which focuses on women in Wales from the Celtic era to the present day (Draisey, 2004). Chapters deal with a range of issues from marriage traditions and the early legal status of women, whilst the last three decades of

the twentieth century are covered in one chapter (Draisey, 2004). Unfortunately, although there are some useful current statistics such as the number of women working in Wales and birth rates, other sections could have been expanded. For example, he states: “small action groups sprang up in many towns all over Wales, but only the Swansea group needs to be mentioned here” (Draisey, 2004, p. 180). There is no indication as to *why* only the Swansea group should be mentioned. (It may be pertinent to note that the author is based in South Wales near Swansea.)

Despite extensive searching, I could not find any literature discussion the establishment, relevance or significance of AMC/WAW and their distributed approach to women’s archives.

2.6 Summary

Not all the literature within the field of women’s information and women’s libraries is explicitly located within feminist theories, but it can be considered feminist in that it explores areas previously ignored by research from a women’s perspective (Harding, 1986, p. 245). From the above discussions, it is possible to see patterns in the research. The research into women’s information needs tends to fall into two categories: those that focus on specific types of women (i.e. users) e.g. older women, black women, lesbians, rural women; and those that focus on specific types of information that women might need e.g. health information. Despite the different approaches and methods used, most studies conclude that women use informal channels for finding information, but often the information they need is disseminated primarily by formal means. This creates issues of an information gap, or a mis-match in communication which can lead to the women lacking the information or the know-how that they need. Therefore, what is important to consider is that research into women’s information needs should explore not only what information women need, how they find it, and how it helps them in their worlds, but should also explore any potential gap between women and access to the

information they need, and provide recommendations as to how information services can overcome such gaps.

The literature on women's libraries is also international in nature, yet it presents us with similarities across for the world. Women's libraries tend to be underused, unknown, underfunded, disengaged from both librarianship and feminism, yet despite this they are dynamic and focused institutions.

Although I have brought together these two areas of research here, little other research appears to link these related areas. However, the success of women's libraries and resource centres across the world must surely depend upon meeting the needs of the communities they serve. Therefore, understanding the needs of their users is vital. It is also important to take into account the preference by women across the world for using informal information channels. Women's libraries therefore need to somehow accommodate this general preference for informal sources within their naturally relatively formalised structures.

The literature also highlights the growing recent international recognition afforded to women's information needs, and information about women. The global network of women's libraries, and the requirement for the production of gender disaggregated data helps support the existence of women's resource centres and women's libraries. It is therefore valid to question whether it is timely for Wales to develop a women's library or women's resource centre.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses both the conceptual framework and the practical elements of the research. It explores the research questions in more depth, and discusses what methods are the most appropriate, given the aims and nature of the research. It is important to place the research within an ontological position and to discuss the epistemology as both affect how the research questions are addressed. Different methods of data collection are discussed, focusing on the reasons for choosing particular methods over others. This is followed by a discussion of the practicalities of how the data collection was conducted, and the approaches taken to data analysis. Detailed descriptions of the various women's libraries visited conclude the chapter.

3.2 Research questions

The principal aim of the research was to explore the nature of women's libraries in Great Britain, in order to place Wales within a broader context. The relevance and appropriate timing of this investigation is enhanced by recent ambitions of two women's libraries in Great Britain to become 'national' institutions within the countries of England and Scotland (e.g. Anon, 1998, p. 341; Greening, 2000, p. 468.) In terms of regional (national) parity, it is therefore pertinent to question whether it would be appropriate for Wales to establish a women's library. Furthermore, in 1998 and 1999 both Scotland and Wales were granted (varying) levels of devolution for regional governance, thus Wales has greater opportunities for its own decision making in a broad range of national and local government functions including libraries. This is in conjunction with the recent establishment (in April 2004) of CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales - a policy division of the Welsh Assembly Government which is responsible for implementing policies of the National Assembly for Wales in the museum, archive and library domains. The central research question of the thesis is therefore:

- Is there potential for a women's library in Wales?

Although the key research question is centred specifically on one region, within this there are various related issues that need to be explored across the British Isles before the question can be answered. Further sub-questions are thus:

- What are the roles and nature of current women's libraries in the British Isles?
- What is the place of women's libraries within librarianship?
- What is the place of women's libraries within feminism?
- What models of women's libraries exist, and which, if any, would be applicable to Wales?

Thus the research is investigating what it is to be a women's library, and what roles these institutions play in the wider worlds of both librarianship and feminism. In the light of these investigations, the potential and desirability for such an institution in Wales is examined.

3.3 Feminism and feminist research

As noted in the previous chapter, there is little empirical research on women's libraries, either within Britain or internationally in either library or feminist fields. In the last 15 years or so, there has been a growing body of literature on the topic of women's information needs (see Chapter 2 Section 2.4), but few authors specifically locate the research within a feminist perspective.

Whilst there is considerable debate about what feminist research is (Harding, 1986; Klein, 1983; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002), early descriptions portrayed it as research conducted by women, for women and about women, and research that would lead to social change. But apart from focusing on women, in what other ways might this and other related studies be considered to be feminist?

Methodologically, feminist research differs from traditional research for three reasons. It actively seeks to remove the power imbalance between research and subject; it is politically motivated and has a major role in changing social inequality; and it begins with the standpoints and experiences of women. (Brayton, 1997, n. p.)

It is also argued that feminist research embraces a perspective:

in which women's experiences, ideas and needs (different and differing as they may be) are valid in their own right, and androcentricity – man-as-the-norm – stops being the only recognised frame of reference for human beings. (Klein, 1983, p. 89)

Thus, focusing on *women's* libraries can be justified in terms of the validity of studying women's needs or experiences *on their own*, as opposed to studying the needs of women within say, public libraries.

Klein goes on to say that as well as focusing 'on' women, feminist research should embrace the philosophy of the study, as well as the object of the study (Klein, 1983, p. 91). This means specifically locating the research within a feminist perspective, and using this perspective to infuse the entire approach e.g. when considering the research questions, data collection, data analysis and distribution of the findings; in essence, applying a feminist ontology and epistemology. However, it is also argued that "there is no research technique that is distinctly feminist" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 15). Thus, whilst a feminist approach may be adopted, it does not necessarily help define particular methods or techniques that must, or must not, be deployed. Instead,

what is distinctive is the particular political positioning of theory, epistemology and ethics that enables feminist research to question existing 'truths' and explore relations between knowledge and power. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 16)

Although it may be argued that there are no specific 'feminist' methods, it is possible to discern a distinct feminist methodology i.e. the encompassing belief systems around issues such as epistemology and ontology. But a complication is that feminist research, and its specific critique of traditional positivist research, has sometimes tended to be defined by what it is *not*, rather than what it *is* (Bryman, 2001, p. 23). Thus, whilst certain approaches or theories are rejected by feminist researchers, they may not always

be replaced with one other clearly defined method or theory. Despite this sometimes unclear direction, there are some areas of commonality.

One of the principle tenets of feminist research rests on the assumption that science is not 'value-free' (Eichler, 1991, p. 13). This is in direct contrast to the traditional positivist approach which believes that research and science are neutral, value-free and objective and that processes applied to investigating the natural world can be used for examining the social world. Feminist researchers believe that research is conducted by *people*, who are shaped by culture, society, politics etc. They argue that knowledge is humanly produced (Cope, 2002, p. 43), and moreover, that humans are active participants in its production. "Knowledge is a construct that bears the marks of its constructors" (Code, 1991, p. 35). If knowledge production is an active process specific to individuals, then people's experiences, beliefs and contexts will influence what they count as knowledge and how they participate in its production and legitimization (Cope, 2002, p. 45). Social and human contexts will influence the questions we ask, our approach to the questions, and the interpretations from our findings (Du Bois, 1983, p. 105). Thus, from a feminist perspective, there is no research in the social sciences that can be considered to be completely neutral or value-free. Instead, the values, presumptions and context of researchers need to be stated clearly in any research in order for readers to appreciate the context of the research (Bowles & Duelli, 1983, p. 15). Whilst the issue of subjectivity in research may cause some scientists to have concerns, Code argues that the traditional way of viewing objectivity and subjectivity as two polar opposites tends to emphasise exclusions and reinforces many other dichotomies. Rather than seeing either term as pejorative, she argues for more interaction between the two factors within research (Code, 1991, pp. 28-30).

Related to this is the issue of whether there is one single objective reality or truth that science can test and prove. Researchers employing a positivist approach believe that there is only one objective truth, and that only knowledge that can be tested can be considered to be true knowledge. In contrast, relativists believe that the 'truth' about the

social world depends upon many factors, including the values of the researcher, and so each truth or contribution to knowledge is only a relative position. Another possible theoretical approach is that of realism, which argues that there is a reality separate from our description of it. Meanwhile, feminist researchers (in general) follow a more interpretivist approach which believes the social world to be different from the natural world, and they seek to *understand* rather than rationalise society.

Ramazanoglu & Holland argue that feminists cannot logically be relativists as they would need to accept the multiplicity of truths, thus accepting that all stories or knowledge are acceptable. This could mean that one 'truth' of domestic violence may be that women are weak and need to be beaten in order to obey their male partners. This truth would have to be one accepted valid position as well as one that argues that domestic violence is inherently wrong and the perpetrators should face prosecution (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 55). However, rejecting positivism and relativism can cause dilemmas with regard to a key concept of feminism, that of universal human rights for women. For if there is not 'one truth' how can there be one set of universal human rights?

Many of the women's liberation campaigns throughout time have been founded on emancipation and human rights e.g. suffrage or equal pay. Indeed, Ramazanoglu & Holland trace elements of feminist research to concepts of humanism (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 33). However, by arguing for common rights for women, feminist researchers inevitably subscribe to the single category of 'women' or 'woman'. Feminists are in danger of re-creating similar assumptions about people and humanity that they themselves had criticised male researchers of doing in the 1970s and 1980s. This position was heavily critiqued during the 1980s and 1990s, as many groups of women felt that the category 'woman' applied only to white, educated, heterosexual, middle-class women in the Western world (see hooks, 1981; hooks, 1984). The rise of post-modernism has contributed to this notion of various valid discourses, and the

challenging of the unified concept of ‘women’ or ‘feminism’ (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 84).

Thus, feminist researchers tend to be wary of claiming one single truth *or* multiple truths. Haraway defines this problem as a ‘greasy pole’ dilemma (Haraway, 1991, p. 188), with feminists trying to cling to both ends of the pole. That is, believing in realism, one truth and positivism at one end (seen in work by feminists such as Harding and her ‘strong objectivity’), or aligning one’s research to relativism (multiple truths) and postmodernism at the other. To overcome this discrepancy Haraway developed the concept of partial visions and situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991, pp. 186-192; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 61). This theoretical standpoint argues that there is no one universal truth, but situation-dependent knowledge.

Feminism is therefore, not one theory but consists of many fluid standpoints (Beasley, 1999, p. viii; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 64). Ramazanoglu & Holland state that feminists can have different ontologies, epistemologies, theories of validity and power (p. 15). It is therefore possible for one feminist researcher to align herself within a positivist or empiricist framework, and another feminist research to take a postmodernist stance; an example of the former would be Harding, who has worked towards seeking an end to androcentrism in science, rather than an end to scientific inquiry itself (Harding, 1986, p. 10), whereas Haraway adopts a postmodern pluralist approach that accepts ambiguities and differences (Haraway, 1991).

Whilst there is no single ‘feminist method’ or feminist methodology for applying to feminist research, how the methods are applied, and how the methodology is considered provides scope for a feminist perspective. One aspect of this is that feminist research looks at “facts *and* feelings... the obvious *and* the hidden, doing *and* talking, behaviours *and* attitudes” (Klein, 1983, p. 98, her emphasis) and it avoids context-stripping i.e. it doesn’t remove the context from the data and findings. This is echoed by Cope who argues that:

[r]ather than searching for universal statements that apply everywhere to everyone (and therefore really apply nowhere and to no one), it would be better for us to acknowledge the biases, perspectives, and contextual factors such as political systems and cultural values inherent in the research project and move forward from that point. (Cope, 2002, p. 48)

Despite this recognition of a variety of influencing factors in research and the various standpoints of feminist research there are some commonalities which enable the researcher, and the research, to encompass feminist theory. For example, many feminist researchers apply and advocate the use of non-sexist research methodologies (Eichler, 1991; Roberts, 1981). Roberts describes a non-sexist methodology as one that takes gender seriously (Roberts, 1981, p. 3). Eichler argues that sexism can reside in the language, content and conduct of research (Eichler, 1991, p. 3). She divides the potential for sexism in research into seven categories. These are:

- androcentricity – the viewpoint of males only
- overgeneralisation – when a study on one sex presents research as if it were applicable to both
- gender insensitivity – when gender is ignored as a social variable
- double standards – when behaviour etc of different sexes is evaluated with different standards
- sex appropriateness - e.g. what may be considered as ‘appropriate’ sex roles when they could apply equally to men and women
- familism – when the family is seen as the smallest unit of study, rather than the individuals themselves
- sexual dichotomism – when men and women are seen as two entirely discrete groups, rather than as two groups with overlapping characteristics (Eichler, 1991, pp. 5-8)

Other feminist approaches include an appreciation of the possible inherent imbalance of power within various data collection methods e.g. interviewing people. A feminist

approach would attempt to establish more rapport with the participants, and to have an element of two-way dialogue, rather than the respondent giving and the interviewer taking information. The notion of the researcher being disengaged from the respondent has been criticised by Oakley (Oakley, 1981). She argues that it is not possible or desirable to remain completely neutral or detached during an interview, and cites women interviewing women as being particularly problematic (Oakley, 1981). Instead, a degree of two-way interaction and rapport is often sought within a feminist approach, to overcome problems such as hierarchy and unequal power relationships. (See also section 3.5.2.1 for a more detailed discussion of these issues.)

A feminist approach may also seek to address the nature of the dissemination of results i.e. how findings are disseminated and to whom. Feminist approaches often incorporate distribution through non-traditional channels such as newsletters and Internet sites as well as informing participants or key stakeholders who contributed to the research (Cope, 2002, p. 52). Some feminist researchers may also directly contact participants with transcripts of interviews, or summaries of the findings. This is in contrast to the more traditional research process whereby the findings are often only presented in formal academic settings such as conferences, journals and academic monographs. Again, the philosophy behind the approach is to give something back to the participants, to avoid the creation of separate spheres or hierarchies, and to also empower women themselves. As many elements of feminism highlight the desire to empower women and to challenge traditional hierarchies and power structures, Ramazanoglu & Holland argue that these emancipatory approaches lead to a different style of research.

What distinguishes feminist researchers ... is some shared political and ethical commitment that makes them accountable to a community of women with moral and political interests in common. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 16)

[T]he point of producing feminist knowledge is both to understand the realities of gendered lives, and to be able to transform them. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 163)

Given all these positions, it can sometimes be difficult to define precisely what feminist research and knowledge actually is.

3.4 Conceptual framework

Ontology is concerned with the nature of being and the interaction between social structures and individuals. Bryman distinguishes between two main ontological positions: objectivism and constructionism (2001, p. 16). Objectivism in general asserts that “social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors” (Bryman, 2001, p. 17). That is, structures within the social world are objective entities that are not influenced by humans or other social forces. It is closely linked to positivism and natural science disciplines and seeks to explain situations and link causal variables. In contrast, constructionism believes that people have an active role in constructing social reality and social structures, and these social phenomena are in a constant state of flux as people and their society changes (Bryman, 2001, p. 17-18). This interpretative approach seeks to understand the meaning people ascribe to social entities. Whilst it is possible therefore to discern two distinct belief systems, it is also argued that such a clear dichotomy rarely exists in practice and much research combines elements of both approaches (Silverman, 2001).

This research takes a constructionist approach, believing that human beings can and do influence the social world, and that categories and concepts within society can be considered to be socially constructed e.g. the notion of femininity is created by society and the people within it, and it has changed over time. Likewise, it is argued that the concept of a library has a meaning that is connected to people and society, rather than it having an objective meaning that is not influenced by people or by changes in society. The public library for example, has undergone a variety of changes in the last century and its current functions and role, and the perceptions about a ‘library’ may be quite different from those of 100 years ago.

Epistemology is concerned with what can be regarded as acceptable knowledge. “Epistemology is a theory of knowledge with specific reference to the limits and validity of knowledge” (Cope, 2002, p. 43). It helps answer the questions “how do I know what is true?” (Cope, 2002, p. 43) as well as formulating an approach to looking at how individuals understand the world around them. Some different epistemologies are: positivism, realism and interpretivism. Whilst it is outside the scope of this thesis to provide an extensive critique of each position, the central tenet of each approach is outlined below.

Positivism advocates the application of traditional methods, used to study the natural world, to the study of the social world. Positivists argue that science can be conducted in a value-free, objective manner and a neutral process can discover a single ‘truth’. In general, it is this form of research that feminists disagree with most (see Section 3.3). Realism comes from the position that believes that there is an objective reality that is possible to know, which is separate from our description or understanding of it. It shares some common ground with positivism in that it also adopts the same approach for studying the natural and social worlds and is concerned with uncovering truths or rules about the social world. These two positions relate back to an ontological position that argues that there is an external quantifiable social reality that has a direct impact on individuals, and thus the rules governing such a reality can be discovered.

Interpretivism in contrast, requires a different approach for the study of the social world to that of the natural world. Interpretivists seek to *understand* human behaviour and the social world, whereas a positivist would seek to *explain* the situation (Bryman, 2001, p. 13). An appreciation of subjectivity and bias is therefore important to interpretivists. Furthermore, individuals within society are regarded as important actors who can change social structures. Therefore, studying the structures alone, removed from human interpretations or meanings is not applicable. Instead, the interpretations of individuals, what meanings they ascribe to social structures etc, are central to the research process. However, as with ontological assumptions, the barriers between each paradigm are not

necessarily unbreachable, and there may well be a blurring between epistemologies (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 4-5).

This thesis is conducted within the interpretivist approach as I believe that the social world, and the study of it, is fundamentally different from the natural world. Furthermore, I do not consider there to be one single, objective truth that can be found and explained, thus both the positivist and realist approaches are not appropriate. I also am not convinced that it is possible to rigorously test ideas that originate from the social world in order to accept them as knowledge. Instead, I believe that the social world, consisting of humans within changing contexts and situations, can be examined through a variety of methods that seek to understand the structure of the social world and the institutions and human relationships within it. This thesis is, therefore, an interpretation of the situation of women's libraries, and presents one version of these structures. Whilst I am wary of the danger of fragmentation that a postmodern perspective can bring, the research is framed within an approach that, whilst accepting that there cannot be a single category of 'woman' that is applicable to every woman in the world, believes that generalisations *are* possible within broad categories.

These two approaches, and the application of a feminist perspective, have influenced the theoretical underpinnings of the research, the formation of the research questions and the processes of data production and analysis.

3.4.1 *Reliability and validity*

In the natural sciences, reliability and validity are essential to the integrity of research. This is no less necessary or important in the social sciences, but the traditional methods employed for ensuring that the research is reliable and valid are not always the most appropriate for the social sciences (Glazier, 1992, p. 211), especially given that I believe that most research conducted within a social science setting is different from research within the natural world. Many feminist researchers would also argue that it is open to debate whether it is possible to create valid or objective truth, and thus the notions of

validity and reliability are, to some extent, redundant. However, feminists still need criteria of validity if they are to be able to judge knowledge claims and thus present truer or 'better' knowledge. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 135). Further, Ramazanoglu & Holland state that

criteria of validity differ according to ontological and epistemological assumptions that shape particular knowledge claims and particular notions of science, research and curiosity. (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 135)

Reliability is concerned with consistency. There are three aspects to this: if it was done again, would the same results be found (i.e. stability over time); equivalence (can it be done elsewhere?); and internal consistency (i.e. are answers in one section confirmed by another?) (Bryman, 2001, p. 70; Fink & Kosecoff, 1998, p. 34). However, such measures are awkward to apply to the human or social sciences, partly because there is less stability in their circumstances. For example, in pure sciences, the acceptable percentage of variation in an experiment may be 1%, but in sociology it may be 50% (Glazier, 1992, p. 211).

These differences do not necessarily reflect the rigor of the research in one area versus another; rather, it appears to be endemic to the nature of the phenomena being researched and the researcher's ability to control the variables impacting such phenomena. (Glazier, 1992, p. 211)

Other problems that occur with the applicability of these measures include reliability of circumstances. With interviews for example, if a participant sees that the line-manager is within ear-shot, they may well say something different from their true feelings. Thus, the respondent's words cannot be assumed to be totally reliable (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 58). Further, reliability over time may be harder to achieve in the social sciences. For example, libraries and their uses change all the time, and a researcher cannot expect to find the exact same conditions if they returned in a week or a year (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 59). Related to reliability is the notion of whether the

research is replicable, not just by the same researcher, but by other researchers in other times and places (see below).

Validity is concerned with accuracy and the extent to which a method can provide a correct answer (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 57), that is, the integrity of the conclusions (Bryman, 2001, p. 30). Validity is linked to truth and builds upon the foundation of reliability. There are several elements to validity: face validity – does it fit into the expected pattern; criterion validity – establishing the accuracy of the findings by using another method; internal validity – are we sure that any causal relationships found are related to the identified variables (Bryman, 2001, p. 30); external validity – can the results be applied outside of the specific research context; and construct (measurement) validity – at analysis stage, does it have meaning in the conceptual framework (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, pp. 61-62), or, does it measure what it aims to measure i.e. does the IQ test measure intelligence (Bryman, 2001, p. 30).

Some argue that validity is not so relevant for qualitative studies as it is concerned with testing credibility which instead can come from checking with those involved and prolonged engagement in the practical research (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 63). Validity may also be checked by repeating processes a number of times (Glazier, 1992, p. 212), either by the same researcher or subsequent researchers. However, replication occurs more in the natural sciences and less often in the social sciences. In the latter, researchers tend to move on, construct a new model etc, and often do not revisit or replicate their previous work. If someone else replicates their work there is often “a scornful [cry of] ‘That’s already been done by ten years ago’”. (Johnson, 1990, p. 17 quoting Pelto & Pelto 1979, p. 286). There is also the argument that replication is often harder in the social sciences because authors often only give a limited discussion about their methodologies and research design in their publications (Johnson, 1990, p. 17).

However, despite these problems with the notions of reliability and validity, there are few alternative approaches for establishing the credibility of social science research. For some qualitative methods it is possible to apply consistency checks by examining the literature and comparing one's findings with others. Another method may be to employ triangulation i.e. using several data collection methods to compare results (Glazier, 1992, p. 211) and for the researcher themselves to assess the reliability of the data by consistent note taking, immersion in the context, exposure to multiple situations and referring to other research experiences (see Chatman, referred to in Gorman & Clayton, 1997, pp. 58-59).

Some researchers go further and argue that these controls or measures are not necessary at all outside quantitative circles. Wolcott argues that the language of qualitative research is different and thus different concepts are relevant (see Henry Wolcott referred to in Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 58). Ramazanoglu & Holland argue that validity can be applied by the researcher within the context of reflexivity and they present a list of 10 criteria for consideration such as: considering the background of the feminist researcher making the knowledge claim; whether the knowledge claim is confined to local truth or is more general; and how the evidence/grounding is constituted and assessed (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 138).

For this research, the concept of reliability applies in the sense that it is replicable by other researchers in other times and spaces, in the rest of the British Isles, or across the world. I have attempted to set out my approach, methods and methodology clearly and stated the procedures followed. Whilst triangulation has not been deployed, the findings can still be considered to be internally consistent in that the words of the participants correspond with observational findings and information in documents, including research findings from the only other comparable study (Ilett, 2003). However, I do not believe that in the social sciences it is possible to conduct the study again and to produce exactly the same findings. For example, this research relies heavily on peoples' words and quotes to illuminate a point. If the study was conducted again, it would be

during a different point in time, when different issues are of concern to the participant being interviewed. It might not even be possible to interview the same individuals. (Indeed, this study cannot be repeated as one of the libraries closed during the research process, and some members of staff have left other libraries.)

In terms of validity, the approach by Ramazanoglu & Holland has been adopted as being most suited to this qualitative, social science, feminist research. Thus the forms of reasoning that this knowledge claim depend upon have been clearly stated, and along with their other criteria, my reflectivity has enabled the validity of the research to be continuously checked (see Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 138).

Whilst most scientific research has not concerned itself with who the researcher is, feminism believes that the researcher does have an impact on the research, thus it is useful to know who and what they are. Previously, and in much positivist empiricist research, the researcher is not an issue, principally because to accept otherwise could undermine key assumptions of science, such as neutrality, the existence of a single truth, and the tacit assumption that man (as a sex) equates to all of humanity. A prime motivator for much feminist research is the opportunity to correct the imbalance of who conducts research, and on what subject areas, thus diluting the prominence of white, middle-class male researchers (Brayton, 1997, n. p.). In addition, women have, during various historical periods, been seen as incapable of rational thought, and their knowledge has been dismissed or belittled (Code, 1991, p. 233). At its most extreme, their knowledge has been feared so much that the women themselves have been persecuted (e.g. the 'witches' and wise women persecuted across America and Britain c.1400-1800 (Pavlac, 2005, n. p.)). Code argues that even today some professional women are still only able to claim a limited cognitive authority (Code, 1991, p. 222). Taken together, these issues have led to a distinct field of feminist knowledge, which places some emphasis on the role of the researcher in the research process. Feminists believe a range of subjective factors are epistemologically significant within the research process e.g. culture, language, sex and location (Code, 1991, p. 4 & p. 56).

How these factors have had an influence on this thesis can be seen in Section 1.4 of Chapter 1.

3.5 Methods

3.5.1 A qualitative approach

The data production approaches used in this research were qualitative in their design, influenced by the stated epistemological and ontological positions. Glazier argues that: “[t]he strength of qualitative data is its rich description ... The richness of the data is ensured by the breadth of the context captured with the data” (Glazier, 1992, pp. 6-7). This thesis was seeking an understanding of the role and status of women’s libraries in Britain and through that, an understanding of the position of women’s information and archives within Wales, thus placing Wales within the larger context of the British Isles.

Although there has been a recent reappraisal of the qualities of quantitative research by some feminist researchers (Bryman, 2001, p. 286; Harding, 1987), some of the key components of a quantitative approach are at odds with feminist perspectives. These contra-indications are that quantification often suppresses people’s voices by submerging them below facts and figures. This is in direct opposition to the basis of feminism which aims to draw attention to women’s concerns, generating conclusions based on women’s own words e.g. from interviews. Further, the pre-determined categories often used in quantitative research frequently result in an emphasis on what is already known, thus potentially furthering the silencing of women’s voices. Also, quantitative research can turn people into passive objects, with no two-way processes; feminism strives to avoid this in society as well as within research. Further, the nature of the investigation, that of examining a selection of institutions and considering their nature and applicability to Wales does not facilitate the collection of quantitative data or a quantitative approach and is more suited to a qualitative approach. Gorman & Clayton state that “[t]he ultimate goal of qualitative research is to understand those being studied

from their perspective” (1997, p. 23). This fits with Bryman’s definition of qualitative research. Bryman describes the core elements of a qualitative approach as being:

- seeing through the eyes of the participants
- description and context
- processes
- flexibility; and
- concepts and theory as outcomes of the research process (Bryman, 2001, p. 264).

These core elements and how they have been applied in this research are considered below.

People and their social world are the subjects of the social sciences. Therefore, it is essential to see the social world through their eyes and to understand the meanings they apply to it and their experiences. This can be achieved by seeking their views and seeking to understand their context, and experiences of the social world. This was achieved here by in-depth interviews and relates to the above stated interpretivist stance taken within this research.

Further, qualitative research seeks to describe, understand and explain a situation *in its context*. Thus descriptive detail is used to build up the context so that the people or structures in a study may be best understood within their whole background, i.e. not looking at one aspect out of context. Here this has been achieved by providing rich descriptions of the selected libraries in order to allow a deeper understanding of their contexts (see descriptions in Section 3.10).

Qualitative social science research is often concerned with how events or patterns unfold over time, and the processes involved. This is in contrast to a quantitative approach, and particularly natural science research which, in general, records a situation at one point in time, i.e. a static situation. Although looking at processes over time may be more associated with ethnography (Bryman, 2001, p. 279), it can be applied to many

qualitative studies. In this research, this was applied by seeking to understand the origins, aims and history of the various women's libraries, and to explore the processes that had affected their changing aims, roles and outlooks.

With regard to quantitative research, there is often a pre-determined structure with fixed hypotheses, categories and labels. In contrast, a qualitative approach seeks to remain flexible in terms of the defined structure of the research in order to take advantage of new discoveries or interpretations. For example, in a structured interview there may be little opportunity for a participant to volunteer an angle that the researcher had not thought of – a semi-structured interview schedule (such as the type deployed in this research), allows greater flexibility and enables ideas to be generated by, and flow from, the discussion.

Finally, qualitative social science research will often apply the principle that concepts and theories are outcomes of the research process, rather than pre-formulated ideas. Strictly speaking, this implies a grounded theory approach, although true grounded theory methodology also encompasses a constant feeding back of the findings from data analysis into the data collection processes, refining the processes and questions where applicable. Bryman notes however, that whilst many research projects claim to follow a grounded theory approach, few actually apply all the principles (2001, p. 391). Grounded theory is an inductive approach, where theory arises out of the data, and contrasts with a deductive approach where a pre-conceived theory is tested against hypotheses. For this thesis, an inductive approach was adopted so that the situations of women's libraries in Britain and the situation in Wales could be explored in their own terms in order to provide some understanding and context as to the potential role of a women's library in women's lives in Wales. The theories and concepts regarding women's libraries in Britain have arisen out of the research. However, the research was not conducted within a grounded theory approach.

3.5.2 Relating methods of data collection to the research questions

With a feminist perspective and an interpretivist, constructivist, inductive, qualitative approach pervading the research, what methods might be appropriate for data collection? The principal research aim, of seeking to explore whether there is potential for a women's library in Wales means one has to be able to answer the question: 'what are women's libraries?' Once an understanding of their nature, roles, aims, structures and processes has been reached, it should be possible to examine the potential for such an organisation in Wales, bearing in mind the current structures that already exist in Wales. Therefore, methods need to be chosen that would help illuminate the current positions and functions of women's libraries in the British Isles. The current situation in Wales would also need to be investigated, and the findings from the practical research would need to be analysed within the context of Wales, as well as within the broader context of current librarianship. In order to choose the optimum data production methods, a range of possible methods were considered and their suitability to this research is discussed below.

3.5.2.1 Interviews

Interviews enable the researcher to delve deep into a situation in a way that questionnaires are often unable to do. Using a qualitative approach implies, to some extent, the use of a semi- or unstructured interview schedule, as opposed to a structured interview schedule which can often just resemble a questionnaire. Semi- or unstructured interviews are more flexible and can be compared to conversations in style. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to explore issues as they arise, whilst providing an initial framework for areas for discussion. They also facilitate an immediate response to a question, allow both parties to explore the meaning of the questions and answers and resolve any ambiguities and can provide a friendly emphasis to data collection (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 124). Further, they encourage the participant to tell 'the story' in their own words. This is most beneficial not only for a feminist approach, but also when seeking an understanding into processes and beliefs. They can also return an element of power to the participant in that the participant can, to some extent, determine the direction and content of the interview.

However, interviews (and particularly semi-structured ones) should not be seen as problem free: they can be time consuming, costly, overly personal and open to bias (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 125). It can also be difficult to sift the useful information from the whole (possibly lengthy) interview. There may also be a discrepancy between what the participants say and what they actually feel. Interviews, even if completely unstructured, are not natural settings, and if the participant is reserved, unforthcoming or reticent, the 'flow' of the interview may be less like a conversation than a question and answer session. Conversely, the opposite can also happen, with a very talkative participant, with the potential danger of a 'life-history' or narrative account ensuing, unless the interviewer is able to guide the interview to the necessary questions.

An interview may also be seen as a one-way medium, with the researcher rarely giving back to the participant (Oakley, 1981, p. 30). There is often little of benefit for the participant. Furthermore, interviewees can be seen as passive objects or data sources (Oakley, 1981, p. 30) and there may be little or no social interaction between the two people, with the situation being one of hierarchical power. Feminism however, sees interview participants as individuals and values their experiences and also tries to avoid situations of power being imposed over others. Another problem is that the interview process itself may remove the context, so that extraneous material is eliminated as superfluous. As was discussed earlier, qualitative research tends to be context-rich, so extra detail is useful such as body language, tone of voice etc. Also, interviewers are encouraged to be neutral, not to give opinions, and not to answer questions. However, this again can lead to a question-answer session, rather than a more in-depth discussion, and some evidence may not come to light.

In what is now frequently-quoted research, Oakley encountered many problems whilst she was interviewing pregnant women, and argues that interviews should not be automatically regarded as qualitative in approach and suitable for feminism, and that women interviewing women may encounter some problems. Whilst she was conducting

her interviews she found that the women repeatedly asked her questions that she could not possibly answer with: “‘I guess I haven’t thought enough about it to give a good answer right now’” or to use a head-shaking gesture which implies that the question was too tough to answer – answers that the textbooks suggest should be used. For example, many of the women were pregnant for the first time and asked her (as a mother) things like “‘why is it dangerous to leave a small baby alone in the house?’” and “‘which hole does the baby come out of?’” (Oakley, 1981, p. 124). She argues that by answering, the interviewer becomes more involved with the participant and thus interviews cannot be seen as a detached method of data collection. Further, if a series of interviews are conducted with the same participants over time, a relationship builds up that may or may not affect the process. (This confirms the belief that science and research is not value-free or totally objective.) She argues however that although the interviewer cannot remain neutral this need not lead to bias, but may lead to differences of understandings (Oakley, 1981, p. 51). That is, each interviewer would produce different findings corresponding to their different interpretations of situations.

Others have argued that women interviewing women can be a positive experience, and the expected barriers between an interviewer and participant (e.g. power imbalance, one-way dialogue etc.) may not materialise (Finch, 1993, p. 174). Furthermore, some feminist researchers also contend that as women tend to be highly skilled in human interaction and conversation, interviews are well suited to feminist researchers (Reinharz, 1992, p. 20).

Other common problems with interviewing are related to empathy. Where social or biological variables match between interviewer and participant, the degree of empathy may be greater and this may lead to a more revealing interview (Oakley, 1981, p. 55; Valentine, 2002, p. 119). For example, a young white male researcher may not gain the trust of older, Asian women. This is particularly true for interviews where the issues are sensitive or personal. This issue of difference could theoretically lead to different researchers achieving different results. This therefore supports the argument that

research is not value-free and cannot claim to be entirely objective. Even if the researcher maintains (or attempts to maintain) a neutral position throughout the research, their participants may well be influenced by a variety of factors leading to subjective, context-dependent results.

Despite these potential problems, it was decided that interviews were the most appropriate method for data production. One reason is the depth of information that can be provided during an interview. In order to place Wales in a wider context, the situation of women's libraries in the British Isles is of immense relevance. Thus, their history, aims, roles, functions, current processes etc, are of interest. Whilst some relevant information can be obtained by documents, staff members are often best placed to answer questions about the organisation, especially if they are long-serving members.

Conducting face-to-face interviews with staff members would also provide the researcher with an opportunity to visit each library, to use their collections (where appropriate), take pictures, develop a feeling for the type of institution and structure, and to witness first-hand the processes involved in serving their communities. Therefore, combining visits with interviews would be a sensible and practical approach.

Further, face-to-face interviews, particularly within a feminist perspective, allow for a degree of rapport between the two people involved, and can thus facilitate a greater degree of providing information. This may not be achieved if a questionnaire is sent through the post from an unknown person (see 3.5.2.4).

3.5.2.2 Questionnaires

For this thesis, one of the key aims was to reach an understanding of the functions of women's libraries. Thus, whilst it would be interesting to explore the thoughts and behaviour of current users of the women's libraries, given the limited resources, it was decided that this angle would not be practical or possible. To seek an in-depth understanding of the processes involved in running women's libraries, it was felt that

interviews with staff members would provide more context and information than questionnaires. Furthermore, the participation of staff could be difficult to obtain if self-completion questionnaires were sent though the post with little context as to the research or the researcher.

Moreover, questionnaires are frequently thought of as being a tool for quantitative data collection. This is in part due to their nature and their ability to pose a variety of types of closed-questions which lead to the collection of numerical data and subsequent statistical analysis. This type of approach is particularly suited for testing and proving hypotheses, which is not relevant to this thesis. It is possible to use more open-ended questions, either for self-completion or face-to-face questionnaires, but as this thesis was interested in exploring, in considerable depth, the current and past situations for women's libraries, it is unlikely that this level of detail could be obtained through self-completion questionnaires.

3.5.2.3 Observation

Observational methods are useful means of gaining understanding about the processes involved in a situation. In this research for example, it could involve watching staff conduct their work in a women's library. However, such a research method might not always be practical. Whilst it might be illuminating to sit quietly in a corner of the library for a whole day, or longer, the type of findings produced by this method may have limited applicability in terms of assessing whether a women's library would be possible in Wales. It would also be a time-consuming approach, and the staff in the various libraries may be uncomfortable about being observed. Although I could have attended the libraries covertly, i.e. as a member of the public, if I wished to then make direct contact with the staff, they might remember me from my period of observation and be suspicious as to my motives. Observation is particularly well suited to situations where the research is seeking to understand people's behaviour. However, this research is not really concerned with how people behave in women's libraries. Although an

interesting strand to further research could be to investigate the actual users of women's libraries, it is outside the scope of this research.

3.5.2.4 Focus Groups

Focus groups are primarily used for generating data out of group discussion and interaction (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999, p. 4). They can encourage participants to talk to one another and are equally interested in the exchanges between the participants as the content of what they have to say. Focus groups can be seen as particularly relevant to feminist research as they

are a contextual method: that is, they avoid focusing on the individual devoid of social context, or separate from interactions with others. Second, focus groups are a relatively non-hierarchical method: that is, they shift the balance of power away from the researcher towards the research participants. (Wilkinson, 1999, p. 64)

Thus focus groups are set up as social interactions, best suited to producing data where the social connections are important to the findings. This was not necessary for this thesis. How the various libraries operate and their histories is information that could be provided by documents and interviews with individual members of staff. Although talking to various staff members at once could be beneficial in terms of time saving, the interaction between the staff is not something that is relevant to the research aims of this thesis.

However, it must be noted that two interviews with women in Wales were conducted in pairs. This was for convenience for the participants and for the researcher. Most textbooks suggest that about 4 people is the minimum for a focus group; as there were only two women in each case, the interviews do not fall into the classification of a focus group.

3.5.2.5 Documentary evidence

In addition to interviews and site visits, information was gathered through documentary evidence. For example, recent material produced by the various women's libraries (such

as newsletters, magazines or reports). This frequently provided further contextual information that helped create an understanding of each of the women's libraries, their history, aims and the roles they serve. As this thesis was not intended to be a comprehensive critique of the women's libraries, researching their detailed histories was not felt to be necessary. Sufficient information was gathered that facilitated a brief description of their background, which contributed towards the creation of different models of women's libraries.

A summary of the discussion of the possible research methods is presented below in table format.

Method	Advantages of method	Disadvantages of method
<i>Interview</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ able to expand on points (both interviewer and participant) ❑ able to follow new ideas as they come up ❑ able to clarify any confusing terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ time intensive – conducting and transcribing ❑ time intensive for staff member(s) ❑ no certainty that interviewees are asked same questions in same manner
<i>Questionnaire (post)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ questions asked in exactly the same way for all staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ potential mis-understanding of questions ❑ answers to open-ended questions may be hard to read ❑ too structured to allow previously un-thought of issues to emerge ❑ participants may not see the need to complete and return it
<i>Observation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ able to get a feel for the library and how it is used and run 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ time intensive ❑ not suitable for factual questions
<i>Focus groups</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ collects opinions of a reasonable number of participants in a short period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ time intensive – conducting and transcribing ❑ time intensive for staff member(s) ❑ this study isn't interested in group interaction ❑ this study does not need to talk to every staff member ❑ may prevent subsequent interviewing
<i>Documentary Evidence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ provides additional material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ not all evidence may be publicly available

Table 1: Summary of research methods

In light of the above discussion and with consideration to the aim of investigating the current role and nature of women's libraries, it is possible to see that a combination of visiting and observing the library, documentary evidence, and interviews with staff are likely to be the optimum methods.

3.5.2.6 How have other studies conducted their research?

As has been discussed in the literature review, there are very few studies on women's libraries, either in Britain or internationally. The most relevant piece of research (by Ilett, 2003) used interviews and visits to three women's libraries in Britain. However, for some reason (that the author herself found puzzling), Ilett was denied access to interview staff at one location (the Women's Library). For this library she relied instead on documentary evidence, attended an AGM and conducted two unrecorded conversations (Ilett, 2003, p. 78). She was personally involved with one of her sample libraries and thus relied on her personal knowledge and experience. As the women's libraries in my thesis were all 'new' to me it was not possible to utilise personal knowledge.

The remaining literature on women's libraries tends to be fairly descriptive in nature, rather than providing analytical discussion based on empirical research. It is also frequently written by practitioners at the libraries concerned in the articles, rather than by external researchers. Whilst the paucity of research in this field enables this researcher to operate with considerable freedom, not constrained by following particular data production methods that are taken as requisites for a particular field, it also means there is little other similar research to enable comparisons of suitable methods and to apply the optimum techniques. Despite this, undertaking face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with an element of observation of setting, could be considered to be a fairly standard approach, that could be applied further in subsequent research or by other researchers.

3.6 *The practical research phases*

The practical research was conducted in two main phases: interviewing staff in women's libraries in England, Ireland and Scotland (June-September 2003), and interviewing women involved with related groups working in this field in Wales (June-August 2004).

3.6.1 *The selected libraries*

The International Information Centre and Archives for the women's Movement (IIAV) website was used to search their *Mapping the World* directory which provides listings for women's libraries across the world. It is stated on their website that the directory is updated weekly. Defining the search by selecting 'United Kingdom' brought up a list of 11 women's libraries (in Spring 2002). From this list, another institution was added after a literature search revealed an article on another women's library in the British Isles (Duguid, 2000). An Irish case study was included after attending a conference where the Director of the Women's History Project in Ireland spoke about the organisation, its aims and achievements. This list of 13 organisations was narrowed down to a smaller selection (five) of the most relevant libraries. Each organisation was considered in terms of its scope, services and accessibility. The five chosen were the most general in terms of their definitions and approach as I reasoned that investigating very subject-specific women's libraries, whilst interesting, would not perhaps provide the most useful or applicable information for applying any model or approach for Wales.

The list of possible women's libraries is provided in Appendix 1.

The chosen five libraries were (in alphabetical order):

- Feminist Archive (South) (Bristol)
- Feminist Library (London)
- Glasgow Women's Library
- Women's Library (London)

- Women's Resource Centre (London)

Staff at the five libraries were contacted via a combination of letters, email and phone calls to arrange convenient times for a visit to interview staff. All the staff were willing to participate in the research.

In Wales, the approach taken was broadly similar to that for the rest of the British Isles. Using my prior knowledge from previous research and personal contacts, a list of possible organisations dealing with women's information was drawn up (see below). Some were identified as not being appropriate in terms of their activities, scope, approach and outlook, as can be seen in the first four organisations

- *BAWSO* (Black Association of Women Step Out)
Whilst they have a resource centre/library in the HQ, providing information is not their main activity
- *MEWN Cymru* (Minority Ethnic Women's Network)
Umbrella body - whilst providing some information and training, is not specifically a women's centre or library.
- *Welsh Women's Aid*
Although it has regional offices, HQ, and local branches, all of which have information collections, providing information services is not its primary role.
- *Women's Workshop, Cardiff Training Centre*
Specifically provides training, no resource collection or library as such.

The organisations that were identified as being primarily concerned with providing information, preserving archives or operating as women's resource centres were:

- Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive Wales (AMC/WAW)
- Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre (known informally as Swansea Women's Centre – SWC)
- Women in Jazz (formerly Women's Jazz Archive, Swansea)

Having already conducted the practical research in England and Scotland, the preliminary findings from the data analysis was used to inform the selection of the most relevant and suitable organisations or stakeholders to visit in Wales. Given more time and resources, it would be interesting and useful to extend the investigation to all the related organisations in Wales but the key research question was being borne in mind at all times, and meant that the research had to focus on only organisations that were the most relevant, *to this thesis*.

Having selected the three organisations, a similar approach was used to contact staff via a combination of letters, email and phone calls to arrange convenient times for me to visit and to interview staff. Again, all the staff or committee members were welcoming and interested in the research. The interview with the director of the Women's History Project (Ireland) was conducted in late summer 2004. For reasons of practicality and convenience, this was conducted over the telephone rather than a face-to-face visit.

3.6.2 Interview schedules

Semi-structured interview schedules were created for use with staff in the selected libraries. A basic schedule of 21 questions was drawn up, focusing on the library's aims, funding, facilities etc. Further questions were then added that related specifically to each separate library and their facilities. Because the interview was semi-structured it enabled free-flowing conversation to develop around the questions and for exploration of previously unexpected avenues. The generic interview schedule can be seen in Appendix 9. The interviews in England and Scotland had already taken place, as had the analysis of this first phase of research, before the interviews in Wales were conducted. Thus it was possible to feed some of the findings into these interviews such as the validity of the concept of two main models of women's libraries.

The interviews in England and Scotland were recorded on tape, whilst the interviews in Wales were recorded on an mp3 player (except for at Swansea Women's Centre where

the interview was not recorded¹). The interview with Dr Maria Luddy of the Women's History Project was conducted over the telephone and was also taped, using the mp3 player. Permission to record the interviews was sought and given in all cases. As has been mentioned above (see section 3.5.2.4) the two interviews with committee members of AMC/WAW were conducted in pairs, partly for logistical reasons and also because the committee is made up of a number of the founding members and it enabled the thoughts of several to be heard rather than just one or two.

The advantages of recording the interviews are that the transcripts allow for comments to be quoted verbatim, and they act as a valuable *aide-memoire*, which can be returned to over time, and enable the interviewer to focus on the questions and guiding the interview rather than trying to write everything down (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 131, p. 135). The problems associated with recording are that it may act as a constraint, possibly reducing the likelihood of getting sensitive information; obtrusive background noise may obscure the voices and it can be time consuming to transcribe the interviews (Gorman & Clayton, 1997, p. 135). On balance, I felt that these disadvantages were outweighed by the benefits of full transcripts and thus recorded the interviews.

3.7 Data Analysis

Flick regards coding as the core of qualitative research (1998, p. 178) as it directly influences the interpretation and analysis of the data. A theoretical coding procedure was introduced by Glaser & Strauss in 1967 and has been further developed by them individually throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Whilst Glaser & Strauss' grounded theory approach was not applied here (e.g. the interpretation of the data to feed back into collection of more data), an understanding of coding was important in order to enable a full analysis of the data. Thus Flick's notion of 'open coding' (1998, pp. 179-180) was applied whereby concepts and categories are coded at varying levels: word, sentence

¹ At Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre the one paid staff member was interviewed, but, as she was involved with a training day for volunteers at the time, the interview consisted more of a general chat (with her and the volunteers) during their tea break and a tour around the venue. It was not possible to record either conversation but copious notes were made instead and typed up the following day to ensure that no information was lost.

and paragraph. With these codes as basic units, it is possible to then take each category and look at the relationships between the codes, thus facilitating the formulation of theories (Flick, 1998, p. 185)

The data analysis began as soon as each interview was over. Tours of each library generally took place before the interview, and when the interview ended and any documents had been consulted, I left the library. I endeavoured to retire somewhere quiet soon after, in order to write up notes regarding my impressions of the library, and any anecdotal evidence that had been provided off-tape, particularly during the tours. Although these notes often only contained my impressions of how each interview went, or my opinions regarding each library, they helped situate each library in my mind.

The recorded interviews were fully transcribed by myself as soon as possible after each interview had taken place. Once the transcripts had been typed into Word, they were printed out and read, several times over. After all five interviews in England and Scotland had been transcribed and read, it was possible to see some common themes and issues. The printed transcripts were then marked with a numbered system depending upon the topic under discussion e.g. management = 1, finance = 2. In constructing the list of topics (key terms), I tried to use a word or phrase from within the script, thus retaining an element of the women's words in the analysis. These key terms then formed the basis for the coding trees within the qualitative software NUD*IST (version 4). In order to analyse the data within NUD*IST, the Word documents were reformatted according to the requirements of the software. The initial key themes or concepts were then created as nodes, and each transcript was read (on screen) and coded, according to these nodes. Some sentences or sections covered several nodes (themes) so these were coded twice, or as applicable. During the coding process other themes arose and these were incorporated into the tree structure.

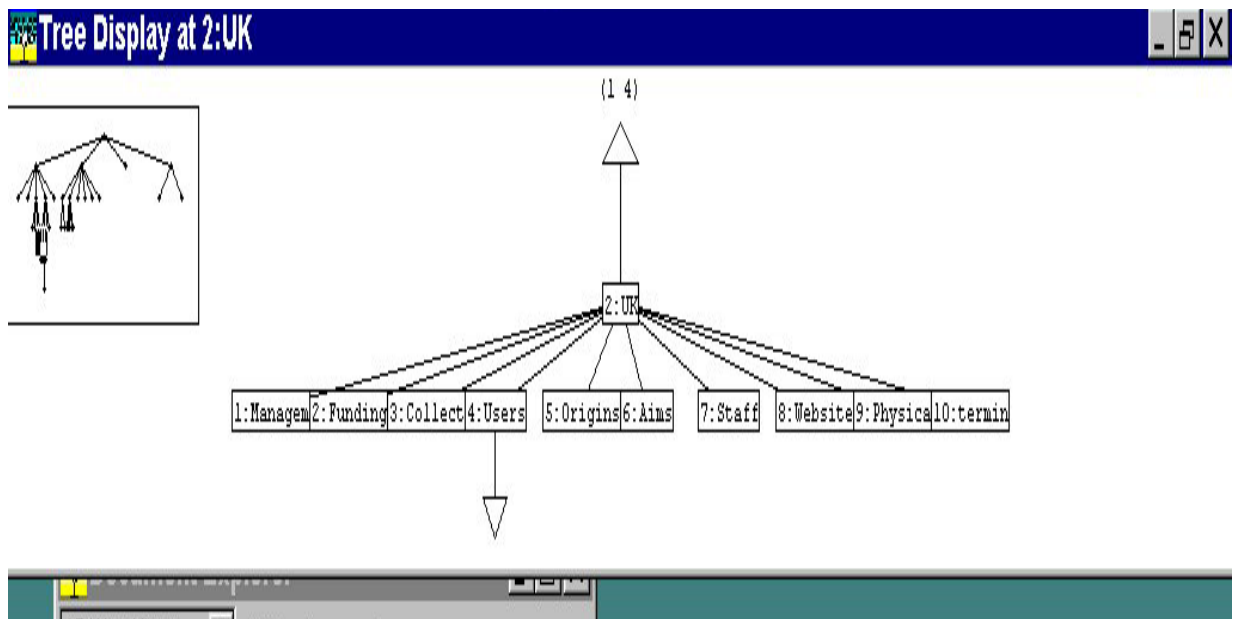


Figure 3: Screenshot from NUD*IST software showing tree display for one node

Having created nodes on specific themes, it was then possible to print out each node, with quotes from all the relevant interviewees. With this level of analysis, comparisons between the various libraries, and exploration of each theme was possible. However, as coding can sometimes be seen to ‘fracture’ the data, paper copies of the full transcripts were always kept close to hand to provide the whole context of each interview.

After the interviews with staff in Wales and Ireland had also been conducted, they too underwent the same process. Whilst there were many common themes, there were also concepts or issues that were particular to Wales (or Ireland), so more nodes were created as appropriate.

3.8 Ethics

Whenever research is conducted with participants it is important that certain ethical considerations are borne in mind (Bryman, 2001, pp. 484-485). One of the key issues is that of informed consent as this can cover other ethical issues such as anonymity and confidentiality.

Informed consent provides the (potential) participant with information about the research which may be relevant to their decision about whether to participate. Such information might include the potential risks, benefits, alternatives and the nature and purpose of the procedure. Informed consent also ensures that the participant understands the information given (e.g. by providing information sheets written in a manner suitable for the subjects) and also ensures that participation is voluntary as the form will nearly always require written consent.

The informed consent form for this thesis consisted of an introductory letter outlining the purpose of the research, the researcher's background, and what would be required of the participant. At the time of interview, a consent form was presented to each participant, again with background information about the project, but with additional material covering issues such as the voluntary nature of participating; anonymity for each woman; confidentiality of their opinions and the recording of the interview. It also included a tear-off slip for their name and address if the participant wished to be entered into a free prize draw. It was decided to offer this prize as a thank you for the participants for their time and thoughts. Although it was only a token gesture, in some way it reflects a more two-way process, and is aligned to a more feminist perspective of conducting research. The participants were given a spare informed consent form that they could keep for future reference. (See Appendix 10 for a sample copy of the form.) The researcher also informed the participants that she would provide them with a summary of the findings, once the research was completed.

The participants (staff in the various women's libraries) were assured of their anonymity. This meant that if they made negative comments, no one would know who had made the comments. This perhaps created an atmosphere of greater freedom for voicing their opinions. When referring to these women in this thesis where I am quoting their opinions, no names are used and instead non-identifying references are made such as "according to one member at a women's library" thus making it impossible for any

reader to identify the interviewee. Unfortunately, where there is only one staff member in a particular library, if a quote is obviously from or about that organisation, it was not possible to disguise the source of the quote.

3.9 Limitations and review

I had initially hoped to conduct interviews with some users of the libraries to explore why they used the library, what they used it for etc., but this was not possible due to either no users being present at the time, or permission not being granted by the staff. However, staff in the libraries did allow me to leave questionnaires (with stamped addressed envelopes attached) and an explanatory letter, in the libraries. A total of two users from one library returned these questionnaires. Therefore it was not valid to include the users' side of the investigation into women's libraries. This would have provided a different angle for exploration, although it could not be matched in Wales where no equivalent organisation exists. No other specific problems were encountered with practical aspects of the research. Despite the localised nature of this study - within the British Isles - and the views of only the staff rather than staff *and* users of women's libraries, the research is still a valuable contribution to the field of women's libraries.

3.10 Descriptions of the libraries visited

Detailed descriptions of the various libraries visited, or archive projects consulted, are provided below. The information is presented here in order to streamline discussion in the findings and analysis chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6), and to prevent repetition of information. The descriptions include information about historical foundations, aims, funding, management, membership or Friends schemes where appropriate, brief details about the collections, number and type of staff, opening hours and contact details. The libraries are presented in alphabetical order. The information was sourced from the interviews and published literature.

Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales

Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW) was officially established in 1998, after several meetings of like-minded women who were interested in women's history and archives. In 1997 Ursula Masson, a founding member of AMC/WAW and Senior Lecturer at the University of Glamorgan, hosted the first meeting at her house, which was attended by about 40 women. Masson was involved with Swansea Women's History group, which she directed in conjunction with Jen Wilson and Gail Allen and which had been founded c.1980/1981.

Early aims of AMC/WAW included a desire ("dream") to create a women's library which would combine an academic (archive) role as well as including social elements e.g. a café and meeting rooms for women's organisations to use. However, personal experience and advice from the professional archivists in the group encouraged AMC/WAW to concentrate on cataloguing existing resources pertaining to women, and rescuing undiscovered but valuable material about women's lives in Wales.

AMC/WAW operates through a system of donations and distributed depositing of relevant material from individual women and national women's groups in Wales. For example, a woman might approach the organisation with a range of material pertaining to her and her predecessors' lives. Archivists in AMC/WAW will then assess the material in terms of its relevance and importance, and if it is accepted by AMC/WAW, a set of procedures is put in place to agree its final location and ownership. This material is deposited under agreement in local public record offices, or the National Library of Wales if the material is of national significance, and in either case it is listed under the name of Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales. Certain restrictions on access can be put in place if necessary. AMC/WAW is currently working on a database of the material donated under this scheme, and the committee hopes this will be available electronically through their website. Their collections currently are focused around papers from individual women documenting the Women's Liberation Movement and women's involvement in the peace movement of the 1980s e.g. Val

Feld, Sonia Davies, as well as papers from women's organisations e.g. Older Lesbian Network, Permanent Waves (a women's arts association) and the Equal Opportunities Commission Wales.

AMC/WAW is run solely by volunteers, managed by a committee of about 6-10 women. It has been awarded some small grants in the past, for example, for a one-year part-time post which started in 2000, funded by the Community Fund Small Grant programme. The money to distribute flyers and hold events comes from donations and subscriptions. AMC/WAW currently has about 130 members. At the time of writing it was in the process of applying for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for two projects, and for an Esmée Fairbairn Foundation grant. If successful, these projects would enable AMC/WAW to set up workshops to promote the work of the organisation, search for existing collections of women's oral history and to create databases of this work.

Ursula Masson, Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales, School of Humanities, University of Glamorgan, Pontypridd, CF37 1DL
01443 483406 or 01792 233482
<http://www.womensarchivewales.org/>

Feminist Archive South (Bristol)

The Feminist Archive was founded in 1978 in south-west England and grew from "one woman's personal collection in an attic" (quote from their website) and was "the first women's library and museum outside London" (a direct quote used in Davies & Walbe, 1982, p. 22, but no reference given by them). It relocated several times within the region including a spell at Bath University Library (Davies & Walbe, 1982, p. 22). The writer Fay Weldon was involved from the early days. It subsequently divided into two branches (North and South) in 1988 for logistical and personnel reasons. The Southern branch has been housed in a side room of a local authority branch library in Bristol since this time.

Its aims then, and now, are to collect and preserve material from the second wave of feminism, roughly from 1960-2000. It remains an independent institution, with its accommodation and utilities being paid by the local Council. Its only other source of funding comes from donations and a Friends of the Feminist Archive scheme. It has about 80 Friends ranging from individuals to organisations and women's groups. The Archive is run as a feminist collective, with no staff hierarchy. There is a Board of Trustees that oversee the strategic management of the Archive. The Archive is open one afternoon a week from 2.00pm to 4.30pm, and is run by two part-time volunteers.

It has a collection of about 1000 non-fiction items, 600 fiction and 1500 other items such as banners, badges, records, postcards, diaries and other ephemera. Some of their key collections include the Dora Russell papers and her Women's Peace Caravan (from 1958 and therefore slightly before the main collecting era for the Archive) and a Greenham Common Collection. From c.2003, it has been investigating the possibilities of relocating the Archive within an university collection and has been holding talks with local institutions. Its 'sister' archive, The Feminist Archive North (Leeds) is housed within Leeds University but is not open to the public. The Feminist Archive (South) is a Registered Charity.

Trinity Road Library, Trinity Road, St Philips, Bristol, BS2 0NW

0117 935 0025

<http://www.femarch.freeseve.co.uk/>

The Feminist Library (London)

The Feminist Library was founded in 1975 in London and was originally called the Women's Research and Resource Centre. Its aims at that time were to foster research and networking, to support women and to disseminate results of research into women's lives. The founding collective was active in publishing research papers and notable writers in the research group included feminist historian Leonore Davidoff and feminist writer and academic Dale Spender. In 1983 it changed its name to the Feminist Library

and Information Centre when it began to focus more attention on its lending and reference resources, and it also signalled a desire to be more explicitly feminist in its profile (Collieson & Follini, 1995, p. 163). In 1991 it became a women-only space (Collieson & Follini, 1995, p. 163), but from the end of the 1990s it was open to men once again. The women-only policy caused some controversy at the time (Collieson & Follini, 1995, p. 164). As well as maintaining a library, it also ran monthly discussion groups and other social events. During the 1980s it maintained an index of women's studies courses (Wahhab, 1980, p. 13) and its collection was primarily centred around contemporary women's information, resources and literature. Its collection consisted of about 10,000 books, 1500 journals, 1200 articles and 1750 pamphlets and items of ephemera. In 1995 it won the Pandora Award (organised by Women in Publishing) for its commitment to women and the book world and was referred to as "the largest contemporary feminist resource and information centre in Great Britain" (Collieson & Follini, 1995, p. 160).

It moved location five times from its founding until 1986 when it was housed near Waterloo Station in a council building along with other voluntary organisations. Prior to this its homes had included being with other feminist and alternative organisations e.g. with *Spare Rib* above the feminist bookshop *Sisterwrite*, and in the Women's Centre in Hungerford Place on the Embankment.

It was an independent institution (and a registered Charity), run along feminist principles as a collective. There were no hierarchical positions among the volunteers who worked in the library, nor among the women who formed the management committee. It had been founded without the benefit of any grants but won funding in 1976. Its annual funding of £39,000 was withdrawn in 1988, at which point many women thought it had closed (Ilett, 2003, p. 274) although it continued to operate, relying on a voluntary workforce rather than paid staff. In the 1980s it had up to five paid staff (Wahhab, 1980, p. 14)). It was threatened with the loss of its office space in

1993 when Council rents were increased, but a grant from the local Council covered the rent increase.

Any woman could join the library in order to use the materials and borrow items, and there was a sliding scale of membership from £5 to £25. The library's income was primarily from subscriptions (membership fees), but this had been falling over recent years. Ilett quotes membership figures of c.1000 in 1982, with a peak of 1700 in 1985. By 2000 this had fallen to 95 (Ilett, 2003, p. 281). In 2003 it was open two and a half days a week, and was run by about 10 core part-time volunteers.

The local borough Council paid its rent and utilities (c. £12,000 pa) but in January 2003 the collective were informed that the Council would no longer pay these monies from May 2003. A reprieve was made to extend it until September 2003. Despite various 'brainstorming sessions' and appeals, the library eventually closed in 2004. At the time of writing the future of its collections remains uncertain.

(Former) contact details:

5a Westminster Bridge Road, Southwark, London, SE1 7XW

020 7928 7789

<http://www.feministlibrary.org.uk/index.htm> - no longer available

Glasgow Women's Library

A community-based arts group called Women in Profile formed in 1987 to create art work before and during 1990 when Glasgow was to be European City of Culture. After this year and its activities ended, it was decided to establish Castlemilk Women's House to house much of the creative work and to act as a centre for the continuation of various arts projects. The positive reception towards, and growing collection of, the Women's House stimulated the creation of Glasgow Women's Library which was launched in September 1991 in premises close to Women in Profile's original work base. The restricted size of the venue and the desire for a more central location led to the Library

moving to its present premises in 1994. It is currently involved with moving to bigger and more convenient premises and will relocate to the newly refurbished Mitchell Library in Glasgow city centre at the end of 2006, and is also considering the notion of becoming the National Library for Women in Scotland.

Key aims of the library are to provide an information resource, run on feminist principles, to meet the needs of women looking for information on a range of women's issues. The library was self-funding from its inception in 1991 until 1994 when it was awarded grants from a variety of sources, principally local councils and in 1995 was able to pay for library staff. Today its funding comes from a mix of local grants, donations and a membership scheme. Use of the library facilities is free but there are currently 1700 paying members of Glasgow Women's Library. As members, they receive a quarterly newsletter and are entitled to discount tickets for library events. Being a member costs from £8.50 low-waged, £17 waged, and £25 for an organisation. It is an independent institution run by a board of directors. The Board consists of women from the paid and volunteer staff, some library members and women outside the library organisation who work in particular spheres e.g. finance or management. It is currently open four afternoons and one late night a week, and is staffed by a total of seven full-time and part-time paid staff, along with about 20 volunteers.

Over time the library has broadened its services from library-based activities to include lifelong learning courses, free advisory sessions, a book club, a newspaper cuttings service, research consultancy service, Women at Work database of women in businesses in Scotland, and an allotment. It also produces a glossy quarterly magazine. It has about 20,000 books and videos, as well as many journals and ephemera. Some of its collections include Edinburgh Women's Centre archives and the Scottish Women's Aid newspaper cuttings archive from the 1970s.

Since 1995 it has housed the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (LAIC), although this is run separately from the Library. It acquired this resource when the LAIC lost its

London home (due to losing its grant). The LAIC was founded in 1984. At the time of interviewing the LAIC was not open to the public, but since the appointment of a Lesbian Resources and Services Development Worker in June 2005 the LAIC is open four afternoons a week.

Glasgow Women's Library was also the first Scottish Parliament Linked Library, appointed as such in June 2003. This scheme is administered by the Parliament's Education and Outreach Service as part of the Participation Services in the Scottish Parliament. It gives women who use the library the opportunity to access information and documents from the Scottish Parliament. Linked Libraries are those that serve a particular community of interest. The Library also offers lifelong learning courses directly related to the Scottish Parliament such as an introduction to the Parliament and how to participate in Parliament. In 2000 it became a registered charity.

4th floor, 109 Trongate, Glasgow, G1 5HD

0141 552 8345

www.womens-library.org.uk

Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre

Swansea Women's Centre was founded in 1979 by women who were involved with Swansea Women's Group, which had been founded in 1972. In 2003 this women's centre was "the only one remaining in Wales" (Rolph, 2003, p. 55). Early aims of the centre were for it to be a meeting place, a social space for women, and to have a direct role in campaigning on women's issues, providing information and a variety of resources. Today, its aims are to empower women to develop their potential and to help them make choices about their own lives. The centre provides an information resource collection (books, magazines, leaflets), and training when there is specific project grant money e.g. for mental help or rape support schemes. Other services the centre provides are drop-in sessions, free advice sessions, free Internet access and volunteer training. The information resource collection comprises of three bookcases.

The centre is run by one paid member of staff, along with a team of about 10 volunteers who do a variety of jobs such as administration or database maintenance. The centre is overseen by a board of management. It moved to its current location in 1997, which is its fourth home. The rent is paid for by the local council. During 2004 the building was refurbished to accommodate disabled access. The building also houses other women's groups such as BAWSO, a black and ethnic minority women's group for domestic abuse. During the 1990s the Centre has been involved with various other women's organisations in the area working towards establishing a single large centre for women's groups, but this has currently not come to fruition. The Centre is open three days a week by appointment only, and two mornings a week on a drop-in basis.

The name had changed over time in order to attract more women and to have a broader remit, thus appealing to more funding bodies.

The Centre is also home to *WomenZone*, a free bi-monthly newsletter for lesbian and bisexual women in Wales. The newsletter has been in existence since c.2000 and is produced by two volunteers who were initially volunteers from the Women's Centre, but gradually took on the newsletter as their tasks. The newsletter is now a separate entity from the Centre. Although about 500 copies are distributed each time, there is not fixed subscription fee or donation required.

25 Mansel Street, Swansea, SA1 5SQ

01792 411119

swanwomens@aol.com

Women's History Project – Directory of Sources for Women's History in Ireland

The origins of the Women's History Project date from 1989 when the Women's History Association of Ireland was established, comprising mainly of historians. Their ideas for tasks and research included creating a database of all documents in Ireland pertaining to women. The group approached the Government and received grant money for one year (commencing in September 1997) to conduct a mapping exercise across Ireland to record all the pertinent records that document women's lives. After this initial year, the group were successful in being awarded further money until 2001 for wider searching of repositories in Ireland. In total 420 public and private repositories in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland were contacted and visited by a team of professional archivists.

The research led to two databases being created for public access via the Internet. One database consists of details of the collections and records mapped across Ireland, and the other details specific papers in the Taoiseach's² files. Both projects are hosted by the Irish Manuscripts Commission. The former, *The Directory of Sources for the History of Women in Ireland* covers over 14,000 collections and sources and contains over 100,000 pieces of information from 262 repositories. The database *Women in 20th-Century Ireland: Sources from the Department of the Taoiseach 1922-1966* contains just under 20,000 entries and provides details on records from central government relating to women. The *Directory* is also available as a CD-ROM.

The project is overseen by a Director (Professor Maria Luddy, lecturer at Warwick University History Department), and a team of management. Examples of some of the collections include papers from convents, psychiatric hospitals, and poor law records. As well as mapping collections, there has also been a degree of 'rescue' work, whereby important documents that are endangered have been rescued from inadequate situations

2 The Taoiseach is the Head of the Irish Government

or from imminent destruction e.g. records from the Girls' Friendly Society, and deposited in a suitable location e.g. the National Archive or the National Library.

<http://www.nationalarchives.ie/wh/introduction.html>

Women in Jazz, Swansea

Women in Jazz was founded in 1986 by Jen Wilson who is still involved today. It was established as the Women's Jazz Archive Swansea and arose out of her personal interest in jazz music and her personal and research interests in women's history. The principle aim of the archive is to collate material pertaining to women who were involved in jazz, not only in Wales but also in America, where the jazz movement originated, and to research the history of how jazz music came to Wales.

The archive was originally housed in Jen Wilson's own house until it moved with her to Swansea University when she was appointed to a lecturing post in 1992. Due to changing circumstances she left the university in 1996 and took the collection away with her, believing that the University was not providing sufficient interest or resources to the archive. The archive was again kept in her house until 2002 when it moved to its current location. It is currently housed in buildings near the Marina in Swansea, with the City & Council of Swansea paying the rent for the rooms.

At the time of interviewing there was one paid part-time development worker, and Jen Wilson who worked on the collections and the archive in a voluntary capacity. In late 2004, the archive was successful in winning a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for two years. The post of Heritage Development Officer was awarded to Jen Wilson to work on the project: Wales, Slavery and its Music. The archive changed its name to Women in Jazz in the late 1990s in order to be more attractive to funding opportunities. The archive is managed by a board of trustees, with currently about 10 members (male and female). The collection includes thousands of audio/visual records, photographs, journals and periodicals, a growing library, paintings, stained glass windows, stage

gowns etc. Courses and workshops are also provided in improvisation, African Rhythm, Bhangra, Small Group Work and Collecting Oral History. Personnel at the Archive are also able to respond to requests to commission music and regularly perform at concerts. The archive is a registered Charitable Trust.

Rooms 1-3 Queen's Buildings, Cambrian Buildings, Swansea, SA1 1TW.

01792 456666

<http://www.jazzsite.co.uk/wja/>

Women's Library (London)

The Women's Library in London has had various names and homes in its past. It was the first women's library in Britain (founded in 1926) and arose out of a constitutional suffrage group. In 1865 Millicent Garrett Fawcett was involved with the Women's Suffrage Provisional Committee (Barrow, 1981, p. 212) which became the London Society for Women's Suffrage in 1867. Millicent Garrett Fawcett also became president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), the largest suffragist group. After various name changes and divisions (see Barrow, 1981, p. 209 for a clear diagram) the London Society for Women's Suffrage opened a women's service bureau to help recruit and train women for men's jobs in the war (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 226). After World War I the group changed its name to that of the London and National Society for Women's Service. One member donated property at Marsham St, Westminster, and this became the Women's Service House. The papers from various suffrage groups were brought together and the formal inauguration of the Women's Service Library occurred in 1926 (Pankhurst, 198, p. 226).

The library's original aims were to preserve the history of the women's movement as well as to provide an up-to-date collection on social, political and economic concerns useful to women in their new public lives (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 226). Thus it was not only an archive but also a resource for women wanting to enter into the hitherto closed professions. During the 1930s the Women's Service House was a multi-purpose

women's centre which housed a lecture theatre, café, theatre, the library etc, and was frequented by the likes of Virginia Woolf and Vera Brittain (Ilett, 2003, p. 240). In 1940 the building was bombed and the library moved to Oxford temporarily. It returned to London over a five year period and was brought back together in a new building in 1956 on Wilfred St, Westminster (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 229).

In 1953 the London and National Society for Women's Service became the Fawcett Society in honour of Dame Millicent Garret Fawcett and her daughter Philippa Fawcett (who had financially assisted the Library) and four years later the Fawcett Library Trust was founded as educational charity. The Women's Service Library was transferred to the care of the Trust, and it became the Fawcett Library in 1957, with the aim of promoting and advancing education and learning (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 229). The 1970s saw a decline in members, decline in donations and rise in costs (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 230). Approaches were made to institutions in the hope of finding a way of supporting the library as the Fawcett Society decided it could no longer support the library. In 1976/77 it came under the ownership the City of London Polytechnic (where Rita Pankhurst was Chief Librarian of Library Services and Cynthia White, an active Fawcett Society member, was Head of the Sociology Department). The Polytechnic was able to appoint nine workers for a year under the Job Creation Scheme which enabled the stock to be sorted, rearranged and for a stock check to be conducted, although a large amount of the material remained uncatalogued (Barrow, 1981, p. 192). A little later it received £35,000 from the Inner London Education Authority to pay for librarians and archivists, but due to funding cuts it had to reduce staff in the late 1980s (Ilett, 2003, p. 252). City of London Polytechnic later became London Guildhall University, which, when it merged with the University of North London, became London Metropolitan University (LMU).

From 1977 to 2002 it was housed in a basement at Calcutta House. In 1998 the National Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) awarded London Guildhall University a grant of £4.2 million for the library to relocate into a new purpose-built building nearby in the East

End of London. The library re-opened in February 2002 with the total capital cost being £6.9 million. The building, on the site of a former wash-house and laundry, has won several awards including Best UK Building of 2002 from the Royal Institute of British Architects Journal and Best Public Building from the Brick Development Association Brick Awards 2002. During the HLF application the Fawcett Library had become, temporarily, The National Library of Women (e.g. Anon, 1998, p. 341; Greening, 2000, p. 468; Purvis, 1998, n. p.). After discussions with the other women's libraries in Great Britain it settled on the new name of The Women's Library which was formally agreed at the 2001 AGM (Ilett, 2003, p. 249).

Its aims today are to provide reference material and archives on all areas of women's lives in Britain. London Metropolitan University provides it with an income, and it also receives donations from other sources including a range of educational and arts organisations. Income is also provided by the Friends of the Women's Library scheme (formerly Friends of the Fawcett Society) who pay from £15 upwards to be a Friend. There is also a Patron scheme whereby patrons who commit to an annual fee are entitled to a range of benefits. There are three levels of Patron support, from £30 to £100. In 2003, there were about 300 Friends of the Women's Library (Ilett, 2003, p. 254).

The library is run by a Director and a board of management. It is staffed by a total of 22 staff, most of which are paid full-time or part-time staff, and the remainder are volunteers. Unlike the other women's libraries, it has employed male librarians and archivists, the most notable being David Doughan who was Librarian (and Head librarian 1988-2000, Ilett, 2003, p. 245) and worked at the library for 23 years (1977-2001) (Ilett, 2003, p. 245) and writes on women's history. The first librarian, Vera Douie, served from 1926-1967.

In 1978 it created *BiblioFem*, a bi-monthly bibliography of material in its library along with the collection of the newly established Equal Opportunities Commission, and recent items catalogued by the British Library or Library of Congress that pertained to

women. *BiblioFem* was sold to interested libraries across the world but was discontinued in 1987 as it became difficult to financially support the venture (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 231).

Today, the Library is open five days a week and has a collection of some 60,000 books, pamphlets, ephemera and artefacts including banners, portraits, medals, cartoons and photographs; 2500 periodical titles; 400+ archive collections and 5000 museum objects. It also holds regular exhibitions based on its collections. At the end of 2005 its catalogue was expanded to enable searching of its archive and museums collection.

Within the Women's Library there are three special collections: the Cavendish-Bentinck Collection, the Josephine Butler Collection and the Sadd Brown Collection. The Cavendish-Bentinck collection consists of hundreds of early 17th to early 20th century works relating to women and was the personal collection of Ruth Cavendish-Bentinck (Barrow, 1981, p. 208); the Josephine Butler Society collection is concerned with the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act and includes the library of the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene; the Sadd Brown Collection is material relating to women in the Commonwealth in memory of Mrs Myra Sadd Brown, a suffragette. Within the main collection are personal papers of individual women both famous and unknown e.g. Dame Barbara Cartland (author), Elaine Showalter (feminist writer), Eleanor Rathbone (MP), Sheila Rowbotham (feminist historian); papers of women's organisations e.g. British Federation of Business and Professional Women, 1933-1972, London Feminist History Group, National Federation of Women's Institutes, Onlywomen Press, Sheba Feminist Press, Six Point Group, 1919-1981 (established by a Welsh woman Margaret Haig Thomas) and the Townswomen's Guild, and papers of various women's campaigning groups e.g. Women in Libraries, 1973-1987. It has a particular focus on the papers of the many women's suffrage societies.

The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University, Old Castle St, London, E1
7NT

020 7320 2222

<http://www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk/>

Women's Resource Centre (London)

The Women's Resource Centre (WRC) arose out of several previous organisations, but there is little knowledge of its history or background among the staff, who are all new to the institution. Duguid notes that a women's resource centre was established in London in the mid 1980s to "help women get access to information about groups and services in London via a confidential telephone referral service." (Duguid, 2000, p. 696). In the late 1990s, following consultation with other women's organisations in the voluntary and community sector it redefined its objectives and is now a second-tier charity and umbrella body for women's not-for-profit groups and organisations (Duguid, 2000, p. 696). Its website states that it is a 'coordinating and support organisation for voluntary and community projects' that work for and with women, providing information, training, development support, networking opportunities and policy consultation within the non-profit sector. It also states that the WRC is the 'only pan-London organisation providing infrastructure services specifically for the women's voluntary and community sector.'

The WRC is an independent institution, which is funded by a variety of project grants. It is run by a director and a board of management. At the time of interviewing (2003) there were three teams (development, information and policy) but by summer 2005 this had increased to five (the additional two being central services responsible for the internal administration and management of the organisation, and the Elevate project team responsible for delivering a funded women's leadership and management project). The Information Team is responsible for mailings, the website, the bi-monthly newsletter, membership referrals, the resource library, various services such as photocopying and computer usage, and for running the volunteer programme and managing membership.

The library provides a reference collection for women's organisations but not for the general public. Individual women can use the library if they are members of WRC. The library is accessible by appointment only and falls under the jurisdiction of the Information Team. This team comprised of one full-time paid member of staff and two part-time volunteers. At the time of interviewing the library was located in a single room, and consisted of five shelves of reference materials. The Women's Resource Centre has about 150 members who pay a sliding scale of membership from £5 to £30, depending upon the type of membership (e.g. full, associate, reciprocal) and turnover of the organisation. Individuals can join as members as well. At present any women's group can use the library, they do not have to be members.

The website hosts details of job vacancies for a range of posts at various women's organisations, primarily in the south east. The WRC also runs training courses which are free to WRC members.

WRC produces a range of publications over many areas of interest to the women's voluntary and community sector. They also produce a range of policy documents, responses to Government papers and factsheets. The WRC is also a Registered Charity and Limited Company. It recently moved to new premises, still in the East End of London.

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Chapter 4: Findings from women's libraries in the British Isles

4.1 Introduction

The principal research aim was to explore the potential for establishing a women's library in Wales. This was placed within the context of the current positions of women's libraries in the British Isles in order to understand more fully the various options. The findings from the fieldwork element of the research are presented here, whilst the following chapter provides in-depth analysis of the findings and Chapter 6 explores the options for Wales.

As described in Chapter 3, the fieldwork consisted of undertaking a mapping exercise to explore the current situation of women's libraries, women's resource centres and women's archives in Britain. The findings from the visits to libraries and the interviews with personnel at each institution will be discussed thematically in the following order:

- Origins & aims
- Current roles
- Nomenclature
- Management
- Funding
- Services & collections
- Staff
- Clientele
- Networks and relationships
- Physical space

The anonymous quotes presented in the text are from members of staff and volunteers who were interviewed in the various women's libraries or archive organisations¹.

¹ Where initials are used in the quoted dialogue, AT refers to myself and other initials e.g. AA or BB have been used to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees. Where [X] appears in the text of the quote, this indicates a personal name or place name has been removed.

4.2 Origins of women's libraries

As established in the Chapter 1, women's libraries exist for a variety of reasons. The organisations in the British Isles, whilst all possessing different original aims, follow a broad chronological pattern of establishment that is replicated internationally. This pattern of three main periods of the founding of women's libraries (Kramer, 1993; Moller Jensen & Nielsen, 1995, p. 97) also matches the three 'waves' of feminism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The first phase was during the era of empowerment and advancement of certain rights for women that began in the 1850s and culminated in women's suffrage². During this period the first women's library in Britain was founded (in 1926) as the Library of the London and National Society for Women's Service and was originally a resource for women wanting to enter into the hitherto closed professions. Internationally, it is joined by other early founders such as the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand in Paris (1931) and the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement (IIAV – Internationaal Informatiecentrum en Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging in Amsterdam) in 1935 (Jensen & Nielsen, 1995, pp. 97-98).

The second phase of establishing women's libraries occurred during the Women's Liberation Movement (which was particularly prevalent in America and the UK) roughly from the mid 1960s to mid 1980s. In Britain the Women's Research and Resources Centre was founded in 1975 in London (and later become the Feminist Library), The Feminist Archive was founded in 1978 in south west England, and Swansea Women's Centre was established in 1979. International examples include Frauenforschungs, Frauensbildungs Frauensinformationszentrum (FFBIZ) founded in Berlin in 1973 and Biblioteca Donna-womanfemme in Rome in 1978 (Jensen & Nielsen, 1995, p. 98).

The mid-1980s and the 1990s form the third phase of the establishing of women's resource centres particularly in less developed countries but also within Europe e.g.

² In 1918 in the UK to women over the age of 30 and over 21 in 1928; 1920 for women in the USA.

Women's Research and Documentation Centre, Nigeria founded in 1987 (IIAV, 2005) and the documentation centre at the Women's Institute in Madrid in 1984 (Jensen & Nielsen, 1995, p. 98).

In the British Isles this period saw a range of new women's libraries being established, but not necessarily with government or strategic influences e.g. Women in Jazz founded in 1986, Glasgow Women's Library 1991, the Women's History Project 1997 (although its origins date from c.1988), Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW) founded in 1998, and the Women's Resource Centre in London opening in c.2000.

Although the 1980s may be classed by some as a period of state feminism, the environment was less conducive for feminism in Britain (see section 1.11.2 in Chapter 1) and many women's organisations founded in the 1970s closed during the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Attic Press, Sheba Feminist Press, Onlywomen publishers, SilverMoon bookshop). One woman who was interviewed felt that:

*the times are not so propitious now, to be doing what we're doing.
But, ... as time goes by, I think it becomes even more important to
do what we're doing.*

Thus, whilst the impetus and propitious environment for establishing a women's information resource or archive in Wales *today* may have passed, the actual need for such a resource remains. This issue will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Whilst it is possible to place the establishment of women's libraries within a chronological framework, it is also pertinent to examine *why* they were founded, and by whom. Some of the libraries evolved out of the interests of key participants. This is the case for Women in Jazz, the Women's History Project and AMC/WAW. In the case of the latter two, both arose out of regional women's history groups that were conducting research and were interested in documenting women's lives for posterity.

[O]nce you start researching women's history, well certainly ... at that time, ..., one of the things that you're conscious of is that you're breaking new ground all the time. That a lot of the sources for things you want to do just don't exist. Or, at least haven't been

collected together, have to be created through oral history, that kind of thing.

I mean, I'd worked with Ursula, on the, Women's Liberation in South Wales project, and, I mean, going back slightly further, and she'll tell you this as well, but when she actually set up this research project, she put in, to research the history and to create a women's archive. Now Glamorgan quite rightly probably, said 'we can't do an archive, that's beyond our capability so take that out', but I think that's probably where the germ of the idea came from.

In Wales, there was also considerable overlap between personnel – the same names were repeated with regard to several women's organisations that were developing from the 1970s onwards. For example, Ursula Masson, a founding member of AMC/WAW and Senior Lecturer at the University of Glamorgan, was involved with Swansea Women's History group, founded in the early 1980s, which she ran with Jen Wilson and Gail Allen. Jen Wilson is the founder of Women in Jazz, and Gail Allen is a trustee of Women in Jazz (and has also been involved with Welsh Women's Aid). Some committee members of AMC/WAW are also on the Committee of Swansea Women's Centre; Some early participants of AMC/WAW were experienced in the field of women's history, archives and research and had extensive experience of using other women's libraries for their research e.g. the Women's Research and Resources Centre; the Fawcett Library; and the Feminist Archive, Bristol. Thus, the experience, background and interests of a few women led to several new organisations in Wales. Masson believes that the idea for AMC/WAW came out of some of the projects that the Swansea Women's History group conducted and "out of seeing what could be done, ... to gather together sources for a whole community".

The Women in Jazz archive also arose out of personal interest and social/research connections.

AT: So had you, started this, [the archive], when you did your women's studies course? 'Cos, is it on the Internet that you started this in 1986?

JW: Yes, not knowing what I was doing at all. Erm, I was always interested in history, and it came out of the Swansea Women's History group which was run by Ursula Masson, so she's one of

the figure heads, you know, it's all, linked, ... And she taught me really, how, to do research, and how women were relevant. Because up till then, you know, and especially being a jazz pianist, nobody sort of, you know, nobody wanted to know basically. And so she started Swansea Women's History Group round about 1980, 1981, something like that. And I joined and Gail Allen joined. ... And Ursula dragged me off to courses and things...

Like AMC/WAW, the founders of the Women's History Project in Ireland, conceived the idea of a virtual archive during their own research into women's history and archives in Ireland. Their key concerns were the potential destruction and loss of important material, and thus the loss of information about women's lives. As was outlined in the description of their work (see Chapter 3), they decided against establishing a physical building, believing that many women's libraries suffer perennial problems of funding, professionalism and security. Instead, they opted for a 'virtual' approach by mapping resources pertaining to women in Ireland. As one of the most recently formed organisations, it is interesting to note the new directions in which women's information and archives may be moving. The new opportunities for such resources are of course enabled by developments in technology.

In contrast to academic and research interests, Glasgow Women's Library, the Feminist Library and Swansea Women's Centre all arose out of grassroots organisations. Swansea Women's Group which was formed in 1972, established the centre in 1979 with direct campaigning to be a central part of their activities. The Feminist Library was also established (under a different name) in the mid 1970s with a remit to facilitate networking, to collect and participate in research and take part in campaigning activities. Although established over a decade later, Glasgow Women's Library was also founded out of local community initiatives, in this case arising from women's arts projects during the year that Glasgow was European City of Culture (1990).

Thus there are various origins behind women's libraries, ranging from supporting women in their new careers, providing resources for research and networking,

collating and preserving documents relating to women's lives, as well as evolving from grass-roots movements. These disparate origins can be summed up in

“the feminist adage ... that 'if you don't know where you're coming from you don't know where you're going.'”

The underlying aim of such organisations is therefore to empower women in their present and future lives by facilitating access to the past lives of other women and providing them with a space for personal development.

4.2.1 Aims of the women's libraries

Having established a chronological development of women's libraries in the British Isles, it is possible to see how the era of foundation affects an organisation's aims, direction and principles. For example the aims of the libraries founded during the second wave of feminism often reflected the feminist ideas of that time. With regard to the Feminist Archive South, it was :

set up to record, to archive the material of the second wave of feminism,... . It was concerned that all this wonderful stuff that was being poured out during the women's liberation movement was in danger of just disappearing, so, it was in fact [to be] collected, and to be a reference place for women to come and look at things and discuss and so on, so it had an educational point as well.

I think they wanted, and everybody who's worked here, has always wanted it to be some sort of women's centre with it, where women can come and talk, but it doesn't work. [X] did have its own women's centre, which ran as a separate entity from this place, and that provided what presumably was wanted in terms of the social life and so on.

These ideas of a separate place for women and meeting various needs were very much part of the feminist environment of the 1970s. In contrast, the Women's Library founded in 1926 was concerned with actively helping women in their professional lives and provided resources and services to meet these needs.

The original aims of many of the women's libraries were to serve a specific community of women but, whilst they all still aim to meet women's needs today,

their focus may have shifted. For example, the Library of the London Society for Women's Service was created:

as a library particularly for women who were beginning to enter professional life and needed support and information to do that. ... [I]nitially it was there as a resource for these women, who had just got educated. Middle class women who were going into the professions, to be a support for them. I'd say in the kind of middle period [when it was the Fawcett Library] it became primarily an academic resource for researchers, and it still is very much that, but, but, I suppose since we've moved we've begun to think about how we use those collections more broadly... people who can use them, people who come with different skills. Interestingly most of the people who do come and use them do want to increase or develop their learning...

Thus, the Women's Library has gradually evolved from enabling women to enter into the professions, to being a resource used primarily for academics to now also serving the needs of individual women looking for personal development. The Feminist Library's aims have also changed over time.

When it was set up it was called the Women's Research and Resources Centre... [and it] was, kind of a networking place for women doing research on feminism, ... I think it became more library-like, as time went on, a focus for books. For a long time it was, ..., quite well used by women who just wanted to read books, but now it tends to be used by students... that's why we were thinking of changing [the name back to include research].

Thus, some libraries have moved from research to social aims, others from social to research, whilst others continue to serve educational aims, albeit in a different manner from in the past.

Occasionally, when the aims of institutions change, certain elements are lost. For example, with regard to the Women's Library:

The library was attached to the Fawcett Society which is a campaigning society for women's equality and when it moved here [in 2002], the library bit lost its campaigning emphasis...but I think we do see ourselves as a resource and a library and a place for debate and ideas, rather than a campaigning organisation, which doesn't mean we won't work with campaigning organisations but that's not what we are any more.

The Women's Library however, is used as a *venue* for feminist debate e.g. for a live debate on feminism broadcast on Women's Hour on BBC Radio 4 (7/10/2003), and

on its first day after re-opening it hosted a Women's Hour special broadcast on the suffrage movement (Purvis, 2002, p. 165). Its prime role is as a resource for education and research, rather than active campaigning.

A list of the aims of one of the women's libraries provides a useful example of the objectives these organisations encompass. Glasgow Women's Library's website provides a detailed list of six core aims. These are:

- To provide an information resource, run on feminist principles, relevant to all areas of women's lives, history, culture and achievements for use by women and groups from all areas of the community.
- To meet both the needs of women looking for information, and those of others seeking information on a range of women's issues.
- To collect and archive such information and materials so that they are accessible.
- To encourage the involvement of as many women as possible in developing the Library and its related resources and services and in contributing to the documentation, collection, creation and use of materials.
- To provide and promote lifelong learning, training, education, skill-sharing, volunteering, and employment opportunities for women.
- To provide a high quality service for users, enquirers and members.

(Glasgow Women's Library, 2005, Aims.)

These aims are essentially concerned with empowering women from the local community and helping them develop, whilst acting as an important resource repository.

It's about developing women and developing their own confidence and their own, more importantly, ownership of things, so ownership of their own learning, ownership of the materials.

This social and community spirit is also evident at Swansea Women's Centre. Early aims for the Centre were for it to be a meeting place, a social space for women, and to have a direct role in campaigning on women's issues, providing information and a variety of resources. The current Annual Report states that the centre is

committed to providing facilities and services in a women-only environment. The work of the Centre aims to empower all women to develop their potential and enable them to make choices about their own lives. (Swansea Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre, 2003, p. 1)

Thus like Glasgow Women's Library, the women users are as important as the documents themselves. Indeed, Healy notes that women's centres are concerned with providing education to a feminist community, to empower women, to meet community needs, to promote a sense of community and to facilitate networks (Healy, 1996, pp. 35-36). This would confirm the importance of local women and their education or development as displayed by Glasgow Women's Library and Swansea Women's Centre.

Whilst many of the libraries do have social aims, they also are very concerned about preserving documents from women's lives, as can be seen in the quote regarding the Feminist Archive (South) at the beginning of this section. Likewise, AMC/WAW is concerned with preserving women's archives and documents, although its aims have changed somewhat since its foundation. Initially there was a desire to create their own space, in a specific building. It was hoped that this women's library would have an academic (archive) role as well as including social elements e.g. a café and meeting rooms for women's organisations to use. But, personal experience by the founding members, and advice from professional archivists in the group, encouraged them to change direction towards cataloguing existing resources, and rescuing undiscovered but valuable material about women's lives in Wales rather than looking to establish a women's archive *in situ*. For various reasons, their plans to conduct a research mapping project similar to the Women's History Project have not been successful, and instead they have concentrated on rescuing documents to place in local record offices and the National Library of Wales, alongside raising the profile of women's history.

AT: And the idea then at that time was to, have a physical place, or was the idea right from the beginning to,

AA: That was the dream I think. I think at a fairly early stage of meetings, it was [X] and I, who knew of the problems of collecting, holding, a collection,

(BB in background: realised it wasn't feasible)

AA: erm, said well you know, this isn't possible, and the costs. And [X] said it needs to be a virtual archive.

BB: Yeah, I think she did. I mean I knew Bristol well. And [X] knew Bristol well, and I mean, if you think of Bristol, it's wonderful for the resources but it's dreadful in terms of an archive. And I think we didn't want to go down that route,

AA: We knew, we had archivists on board, you know, we had museum, library and archive professionals, and we felt that if we were going to keep a collection it must be kept professionally.

AA... I mean, it wasn't a realistic way to proceed. And I think what we've come up with in the end,

BB: It works.

AA: It works, and it's a darn sight cheaper too.

Rescue has always been in my mind, but I think one of the key things that we wanted to do when we set up, and we've lost sight of this, not through our fault actually, we wanted to know, before we went looking for new stuff really, what exists where? We wanted in a way, to sort of, catalogue what resources first of all existed in Wales and beyond Wales. In other words, we wanted to do what Maria Luddy and the Irish women had done. But we were, elbowed out of that, we weren't welcomed with open arms by the archive community in general, were we?

Thus practicalities play an important part in determining the aims of a women's library or archive project. The aims are intricately linked to the origins of the organisation, but, are necessarily dependant upon the current social, cultural and economic climate. The aims also feed into the creation of core roles for the libraries and archive projects.

4.3 Current roles

The aims of the various women's libraries support two different roles. One role is of providing resources for reference, archival, academic and research purposes, and the other is a social role, with varying degrees of involvement in the local community, to meet more social or contemporary women's needs³. Within the first group it is possible to place AMC/WAW, The Feminist Archive, Women's History Project,

³ By 'social or contemporary women's needs' I mean issues such as contraception, careers advice, equality of pay, local groups etc

Women in Jazz, The Women's Library, and possibly, the Women's Resource Centre (which is a reference only collection, but, does work with local women's groups). Those within the second type of library are Glasgow's Women's Library, Swansea Women's Resource Centre and the now-closed Feminist Library. However, there is a degree of overlap between these two categories, particularly as the 'contemporary' libraries do also possess valuable reference material and the 'academic' libraries also reach out to local women's communities.

This division in roles poses a key question: is it possible to combine the role of being a reference (and/or lending) collection, a resource for academics and researchers, with that of campaigning, direct community involvement and offering support services to women in need? Some see the combining of the two roles as problematic, for example, when it was still operating, the Feminist Library

has both, a social role and an academic role, which is probably why it's stuck, because they can't define it.

This potential conflict of interest will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. In practice, no library or organisation's role is to be either exclusively academic *or* social – they all combine an element of both roles. However, some staff in women's libraries question whether a library can serve both roles concurrently:

I do think they're different things, personally, either a kind of... archival resource, or, ... providing a service to people, and you can't, they're very different kinds of things.

Evidence from the literature highlights a possible tension when an institution serves several different roles. Colmer notes that

[b]eing both a library and information service, and a feminist women's service, the Women's Studies Resource Centre has continually had to struggle for funding. (Colmer, 1994 p. 227)

In Wales, AMC/WAW currently combine both academic and social roles. Whilst their focus is primarily on rescuing valuable documents relating to women's history, they have recently developed social dimensions to their work. They were awarded a grant in order to conduct a series of Women's History Roadshows. Styled loosely on the BBC Antiques Roadshow, the events are designed to encourage women to bring items that might be of value in documenting women's lives in Wales. The first Roadshow was in Gorseinion, South Wales in June 2004 with subsequent

Roadshows taking place in autumn 2004 and in 2005. Outcomes from the Roadshows include the donation of potentially interesting resources and archives that could enhance the knowledge of women's lives in Wales, and the raising of awareness of women's history. The Roadshows have also acted as social get-togethers, with several women talking about their lives to the women running the Roadshows. This was summed up by one committee member as the public coming with "their life in a bag". It is possible therefore to see that through the academic interest in women's archives a social aspect was also incorporated.

There is considerable discussion and debate about the practicalities and possibilities of combining the roles. The different roles, intricately linked to origins and aims, can be seen to create two models of women's libraries. This concept is analysed fully in the following chapter.

4.4 Nomenclature

Closely related to the origins, aims and roles of the women's libraries is the issue of the names that they have chosen. This complex issue surfaced independently during many of the interviews. For example:

Being called Glasgow Women's Library [her emphasis] is quite off-putting to a lot of people you know because ... the last place I want to be if I've got any issues to do with literacy, is a library. And because everywhere you look there's books as well, you know that can be quite off-putting too.

Because one of Glasgow's aims is to empower women, develop their learning potential and to help those who may have literacy problems, this is an important issue for them to consider. Glasgow Women's Library has other problems with its current name.

In a funny way the library's been a bit put in the background at the moment because, just the way funding works ... and the need for project funding has meant that in a way, it's kind of on the back burner, the actual physical work of a library, so it's quite a funny name for us to have at the moment because it's probably the least work spent on the actual physical [library].

Thus the term 'library' is problematic for reasons of symbols, association and daily facilities.

Discussions on the relevance and importance of nomenclature also raise the question of what it is to be a library. Three of the nine institutions sampled use the word library in their title (and a fourth uses it under the umbrella name of the organisation to refer to the physical space of the library). However, in many elements of their work and services, they are quite dissimilar to traditional 'libraries' (whose emphasis is on providing information resources in a variety of media, to a range of customers, but does not tend to offer extra-curricular services outside of a reading/information framework) and may resemble to some extent resource centres or Citizens Advice Bureaux in terms of offering help and support. The remaining six institutions use either the term archive or resource centre to define themselves and these names tend to reflect more accurately the aims of the institution e.g. The Feminist Archive or Swansea Women's Centre.

The name of an institution is important because not only might it present barriers to its target audience, but it may give out the wrong message. The Women's Resource Centre for example, was thinking of changing its name:

because it's quite a misleading name. We get quite a lot of phone calls from women thinking we're a resource centre for women, which is perfectly understandable but we're not.

They are in fact a resource centre for women's voluntary organisations.

Some of the other women's libraries are considering changing their names due to changing aims, roles and services. The (now closed) Feminist Library was originally called the Women's Research and Resources Centre, and retained its current name since 1983. However, the collective had recently thought about changing the name again, possibly removing the word 'feminist', and finding a name which reflected its recent change in focus towards its research role, after a period of a greater emphasis on the library aspect. But during a brainstorming session held to discuss their future and the accommodation and funding crisis, "we decided it probably didn't need changing at the moment."

Other libraries were also thinking about the link between their name and what they do. For example:

Because [the name] Glasgow doesn't reflect either the material we have, or the users we have, or the type of work that we do... we're looking at the issue of naming ourselves as a Scottish-wide resource, but you can't just do that, you can't just call yourself the National Library [for women in Scotland]...

Glasgow Women's Library re-structured their staff profile in autumn 2003 to create a post for a worker to look at strategic development, one aspect of which would be to become the National Library for Women Scotland. The use of the word 'national' however, caused unease among some of the staff in other women's libraries with regard to the renaming of the Fawcett Library. The Fawcett Library was temporarily renamed The National Library for Women (during c.1998-2002) and this new name was used on their website and in literature (Greening, 2000, p.468; Purvis, 1998, n. p.). However, after discussions, this name was changed to The Women's Library (and adopted at the 2002 AGM, Ilett, 2003, p. 250). Comments made by staff at other women's libraries suggest that the Fawcett Library's decision to use the word 'national' in their new name was taken without consultation, and was particularly problematic for the library in Scotland, hence the subsequent removal of the word 'national'. The idea of a 'national' resource has implications for any developments in Scotland and Wales.

It's important on a political level, and it's important on a practical level... they got their money at a time in the run up to the Scottish parliamentary elections, so the whole notion of national identity, and what national means is very important in that context. But also on a practical level. They went to the Lottery and got money from the Lottery. Now if we were going to go to the Lottery and say... we are developing a women's library of Scotland, they'll say, we'll we've already had a bid, we've funded a national library...

However, the replacement name of the Women's Library is also not without problems. One staff member at one of the other women's libraries sympathised with The Feminist Library as a result of the newly renamed Women's Library.

It is a nuisance that the two names are too close, it's controversial but I do think the Women's Library should have stuck to the Fawcett, as a name. I think it should have been the Fawcett Women's Library or the Women's Fawcett Library or something like that, because that's how we knew it!

Thus, a name is important not only in signalling to people what the institution does, but it also needs to be thought about in terms of other similar organisations. An inappropriate name can have a negative effect, not only on potential users, but on the network of women's libraries.

As with many of the other women's libraries, the name of Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC\WAW) has sometimes been problematic. For example, some of the committee members of AMC/WAW felt that other archivists in Wales were wary of them when they were established:

I suppose we were seen more [as] grassroots people, even though we were academic people, respectable.

Furthermore, some of the AMC/WAW committee members felt that other archivists believed that the AMC/WAW would not only want to take relevant material out of current collections in order to create a separate women's archive, but would also be collecting material that had formerly been their domain:

They thought we'd be collecting the stuff which they should have [...] which they would argue was their, provenance

However, as noted earlier, the group decided early on not to pursue campaigning for a separate building to specifically hold women's archives, and, the Committee has always consisted of a number of professionally qualified archivists along with individuals heavily involved in women's issues and academia and could not be considered amateurs.

Conversely, Dr Luddy (director of the Women's History Project) believes that the Women's History Project was successful in attracting grant money because:

we had a committee, and on this committee, we had very influential archivists, and of course, the thing you have to remember, I don't know what it's like in Wales, but Ireland is very small, and they were actually part of the Irish Society of Archivists, and that was actually very helpful.

(See section 4.8 for a discussion on professionally qualified staff.)

Women in Jazz has also experienced problems with its name, and was previously known as the Women's Jazz Archive. The founder of the archive links the name change directly to the need to secure funding.

The word Jazz Archive, the word Archive was causing terrible problems. We couldn't get anywhere with funding with the Arts Council because we were an archive, 'go and ask the Heritage'. The Heritage wouldn't give us anything because we were an archive, we were calling ourselves an archive [but] 'you're not an archive because you're not registered, you're not with the Museums service, you're not this and you're not that.' So we were stuck in the middle. And after about two or three years the Trustees said 'look, you know, we're not getting anywhere here, so throw out the word archive and we'll try another tack'. So, we called ourselves, they decided on Women in Jazz, and then that wouldn't upset anybody!

Likewise, Swansea Women's Centre has changed its name over time from Swansea Women's Centre to Swansea's Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre. During a conversation with a member of staff at the centre, she explained how the name changed gradually over time, often to reflect changes in society i.e. adding 'multicultural'; additional words were also incorporated in order to attract money e.g. adding 'training' to the name. The Feminist Library, in a discussion with officers from the local borough council and the Greater London Authority, were informed that their collective structure and name were not appropriate for funding (Ilett, 2003, p. 294), presumably because the name appeared to be too exclusive.

Names therefore, are important for the various women's libraries and archives. They not only define accurately (or not, as the case may be) the organisation's aims and roles but can also send unwitting messages to potential users and those who oversee the funding of such organisations. But there may not be an adequate alternative name:

I don't know what we should be called at the moment! It would probably be about twenty words long if we had a title of what we actually do!

4.5 Management

To some extent, the varied management approaches of the women's libraries reflect the different eras of their establishment. Thus, the institutions founded during the second wave of feminism (i.e. the 1970s) are influenced by feminist approaches, often operating as collectives, whereas earlier and later organisations tend to opt for more traditional structures such as directors or boards of management.

An example of a traditional form of management can be seen at the WRC who have a director as the head of five independent teams (Central Services, Development, Elevate Project, Information, Policy). The librarian reports to her manager (head of the Information team), but the daily running of the library is at her own discretion.

At the Women's Library the position of director was created after the Lottery bid had been awarded, and a well-known figure in the arts world was appointed. When she joined the Women's Library she brought "skills [which] were really to do with opening things up, doing public programmes, ..., so I came to kind of give the library a bigger profile." Before this, they had a development librarian who had

done a lot of work looking, basically looking at the state it was in because it had been under-resourced for a long time, and obviously contributing to the HLF bid, which was a lot of work, but, she was a librarian, so I think they felt they needed somebody with more, I suppose, PR kind of, ... broader skills across the board.

The director of the library also has a place on the senior management committee of the University which owns the library, although the Women's Library is considered to be a separate department from the central university library and has its own building, staff and computer catalogue.

A slightly less hierarchical structure is characterised by committees, boards of management or trustees. Women in Jazz is managed by a board of trustees, with currently about 10 members (male and female), some of whom are also connected to other women's organisations e.g. Jenny Sabine who is also involved with AMC/WAW. The jazz archive is run by two members of staff, one of whom was

unpaid at the time of interviewing⁴. The trustees contribute their personal expertise in helping shape the future of the archive and concentrate on its strategy and development, as well as providing support, back-up and advice.

Yeah, they do all that but it's a lead as well, as, you know, this is where we think we should be going next, and 'cos, when you're in amongst it every day like this, you're rushing to do gigs at night, you can't really see where you're going. So they're there as a sort of direction as well.

The Feminist Archive South is also overseen by a group of trustees, three for the South and three for the North branch:

The trusteeship is fairly nominal; it's there simply to oversee so that if anything goes wrong you know they pick the pieces up. ... [T]hey will be coming to the AGM next week, and there will be a trustee's report on what's been going on... . They provide encouragement, they're good like that.

The actual running of the library is left to the two voluntary part-time members of staff.

Although Glasgow Women's Library has grassroots origins (see the description, Chapter 3), it is not run as a collective but operates under a board of directors who meet about four to six times a year. The board consists of

[F]ive women plus co-optees, and the five women include myself and [X] as paid workers, and the other three women are sort of, selected for their expertise in particular areas ... And two co-optees, from the volunteer team and one from a user group.

In addition, there are weekly staff meetings with the general running of the library left to the staff and volunteers.

One example of feminist management approaches was the (now closed) Feminist Library. The Feminist Library was run as a collective, made up of the volunteers who worked in the library, and any users should they wish to join the committee. They used to have meetings "every other week, because of the crisis, but before the crisis, it was about every month or every six weeks." However, some consider the time for feminist styles of management e.g. collectives to belong to a previous era.

⁴ Women in Jazz were awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant in early 2005. The post of Heritage Development Officer, a two-year full-time paid position was awarded to Jen Wilson, founder and

I think there's a problem that the Women's Movement, not that it's moved on and doesn't need them, that's patronising and wrong, but I do think that, in today's society and with funding as it is, ... It's very difficult for anybody to act as a collective any more because that kind of attitude is dying out, and volunteers and other people ...tend to be older.

AMC/WAW is run by voluntary committee members appointed each year at the AGM. There are a total of about 8-10 people on the Committee. Being voluntary:

[O]ur fundamental problem is that we've no paid workers, and we're all, it's just based on the good will, of the committee. But luckily when one is more tied up, others step into the breach. That is, that is working well.

Where much of the management and daily running of the library or archive is undertaken by women volunteers, there is the danger of these members facing 'burn out'. Burn out refers to the "emotional exhaustion resulting from stress on the job" (Mount, 1995, p. 76). This was noted by one volunteer at the Feminist Library who felt that crisis management had taken over, leading to exhaustion, particularly of long-serving members of the collective. With more formal, structured management, crises may be lessened, or at least their impact on the daily staff may be reduced. It may be relevant to highlight that the only clearly stated collective in place was at a women's library that has subsequently closed.

4.5.1 Ownership and independence

Often, management structures are determined by ownership, which in turn is related to independence. The most independent libraries (e.g. with no funding other than for rent and utilities) are the Feminist Library, the Feminist Archive (South) and Swansea Women's Centre. Whilst Glasgow Women's Library is also independent, it receives a number of longer-term grants for various projects (see description in Chapter 3, and Funding Section 4.6 below). AMC/WAW is also an independent organisation, but it has no physical library to maintain and thus is possibly less able to seek funding or association with another organisation.

previous sole volunteer of the centre.

Both the Feminist Library and the Feminist Archive could be considered to be the most insecure of all the women's libraries in terms of their future. At the time of interviewing they were both contemplating their future, with the Feminist Library actually closing a year after I visited. The Feminist Archive was considering joining a higher educational institution in the area, to provide longer-term continuity for the archive. They recognised that there would be a range of issues to discuss before such a move could take place, such as access, a catalogue, storage and staffing. An important point that the Feminist Archive was considering was whether improved access and continuity was worth more than their independence and feminist stance (comments made after the tape recorder was switched off). If the archives were held within a university library, then improved access would presumably be available. However, for the Feminist Archive, part of their *raison d'être* is their commitment to feminism which could be diluted if they exchanged their independence and became part of a university. This complex ideological issue is explored in more depth in Chapter 5.

4.6 Funding

Funding is central to all libraries, but could be considered to be of greater importance to women's libraries because of their commitment to certain principles which may lead them to prefer independence to direct funding from an external source that may come with conditions attached. Each of the libraries visited were funded in slightly different ways but whilst there were elements of variation, they were all experiencing similar problems and insecurities.

[A]rchives, libraries, resources like this, are driven by passion, vision, and nobody is going to throw money at you just because you think something is a good idea. Although us as historians know that there are huge gaps in people's knowledge.

[W]e've always had to get our own funding, it's meant that to survive we've always had to look for different sources of funding from different places, ... , it means that we're totally independent and that we run our own show, basically,... within the limits of what's fashionable for funding.

Often the libraries started from donations and have subsequently won grants. This is the case at Glasgow Women's Library, the Feminist Archive, the Feminist Library, Women in Jazz and the Women's Library. With regard to Glasgow:

in the initial period of time that the library was running ... it was self-funding, [from things] like membership, it came from services we set up like the newspaper cuttings service, ..., it came from research consultancy, and it came from donations and holding big fundraising events...

Today, their funding comes from a number of different sources, primarily grants and project money:

[I]t's based on different projects. Our LIPS project which is a project based on peer support and education supporting young lesbian and bi-sexual women in the West of Scotland comes from Comic Relief, and that's been funded from the year 2000 and we've just been successful in securing another three year period for that so that's [until] 2006... [T]he Adult Literacy Project is funded by a partnership from money that was released by the Scottish Executive to address Scotland's appalling literacy problem.

They also receive grants from Glasgow City Council, North Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council. These grants are mostly for specific projects although Glasgow City Council does provide some money for rent and wages.

Like Glasgow, the WRC also sources the majority of their money from a variety of different funds. For example, the post of information officer is funded by the Community Fund (via the National Lottery and now merged under the Big Lottery Fund), along with grants from the "Association of London Government, although I think that's just run out, from Bridge House, Lloyds TSB..."

However, project money is often short-term (e.g. three years – see above quote from Glasgow), with no guarantee of its continuation. This can have a negative effect on services if they are curtailed or cut. Winning project money can also be time-consuming in terms of finding the most appropriate body to apply to, and in making the application: "it's finding one that is appropriate which is the difficult business". One worker at one women's library said:

We are trying to fundraise,..., but it's difficult because all the funding bodies want projects, and track records of things... .

The WRC has found that:

it's very hard and very rare to get funding for something like this. It has to be, for a specific area, so it'll be funding for a position and also the expenses for that position.

Thus, the libraries find it difficult to break out of a vicious circle – they need to monitor services and spend time filling in grant application forms, yet they often don't have the resources to do this, thus they are unlikely to win extra money to develop their services. Further, one of the key sources of recent funding, the National Lottery, is increasingly becoming less available as lottery ticket sales have declined since 1997, although they have risen since somewhat since 2004 (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2005, n. p.; FundFinder, 2005, p.1).

One further option for funding other than grants, project money or membership, is to become part of a university. At the time of interviewing, only one of the libraries visited was connected to an academic institution and the director of the Women's Library said that "[w]e couldn't survive if we weren't part of the university." The Women's Library receives about 60% of its income from London Metropolitan University (LMU), and 40% is raised themselves and from other project grants. (The £4.2 million Heritage Lottery Fund grant was used for relocating and building a new library which cost £6.9 million. The remaining capital costs came from a variety of other statutory funders e.g. the Higher Education Funding Council for England, charitable trusts and foundations as well as from individual donations. A press information pack lists 19 donor organisations.) Although LMU currently provides a significant amount of money towards the Women's Library, universities can change directions or priorities e.g. if courses are cut. The Women's Library has already survived a merger of two London universities and is, to some extent, dependent upon the university seeing the library as a valuable asset. There are other issues as well that come as a result of joining a university. The director at the Women's Library explains that whilst they are part of London Metropolitan University:

...it's also about how does the library fit into the university, and have on one hand a slightly open separate identity, but on another benefit the university, be part of university life. ... The university gave the library a place, in its structure. I don't think that's quite seen through and the university would agree with that, we've still got work, but they did say this is not something to be hidden, so

this is something to have a place. ...[P]reviously the library was part of the library services department, but we're now our own department.

Thus, whilst the library is more secure now in terms of its funding having been awarded a substantial National Lottery grant and been part of a university for the last 25 years, certain issues can still be problematic, particularly financial ones.

In addition, funding bodies, understandably, want to see track records and statistical data to support a grant application, but some of the libraries do not appear to keep these vital data. Many 'traditional' libraries are expected to maintain such statistics (e.g. public libraries supply information to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport since the implementation of the Public Library Service Standards in 2004, in addition to providing statistics to CIPFA- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy). Women's libraries may be creating additional problems for themselves by not collecting data that could help their financial situation, professional image and development of the library and its services.

Dr Maria Luddy places the success of the grant applications by the Women's History Association of Ireland down to a number of factors, such as being connected to the Irish Manuscripts Commission and having a very interested civil servant supporting them, but also to the availability of funding. She states that:

ML: The other thing at the time was, that there was a lot of money around at the time.

AT: In Ireland?

ML: In Ireland. [?And the] Government, and they were quite keen to spend it on public things. So we really were there at the right time.

Whilst the Women's History Project was able to attract significant public money for conducting their research, AMC/WAW in Wales have not been successful so far with large applications. However, they have been awarded some small grants, for example, a Community Fund Small Grant for a part-time development officer for 2000, and more recently, project money to conduct the aforementioned Roadshows. One committee member noted that there were sometimes problems with short term grants in that the first grant "kind of built up momentum ... [but it] then dropped

again, which is a problem in a way.” However, another committee member felt that “those small grants suit us, to do projects we can, can get our hands on.” The Feminist Archive South has also received small grants over time, for example:

*two Lottery Awards for All heritage fund, to do the oral histories.
That money largely goes to the young women who were doing the
interviewing.*

However, grants often do not cover the basics of running a library or archive project. For example, Women in Jazz receives several small grants for specific projects, but there was, at the time of interviewing, no official budget for purchasing material for the collection.

*AT: Do you have a budget for buying books and buying records,
that sort of thing?*

*JW: No, that got turned down in one of our big funding
applications, it just all got thrown out. They just didn't fund
anything.*

AT: Right. So how do you,?

JW: I buy it.

AT: if you see something you want, you buy it out of your own,

JW: [nods].

This is hardly a sustainable (or professional) approach to creating and running an archive collection. A similar situation is seen at Glasgow:

*AT: And when you get materials, are you given it or do you buy
materials?*

*XX: We don't buy anything. Everything is donated, resources wise,
except for the projects for lifelong learning and adult literacy. We
buy in materials for that because we've got a budget. But we've
never had a budget for the books.*

Not surprisingly, a lack of secure financial resources has a negative impact on the effectiveness and range of services the libraries can provide. Without the financial ability to develop existing or new services, the libraries are unable to plan for future growth. Their resources may therefore continue to be underused and undervalued.

It is possible to conclude that there are links between the origins, aims, roles, management structures and funding of the various women's libraries. Whilst being independent and adhering to core feminist principles may be considered to be

worthy and in keeping with the core aims of some of the institutions, this may not translate into the most effective services.

4.7 Services and collections

4.7.1 Collection size, type and collection development policies

As can be seen from the table in Appendix 3, the size of collections in the libraries varies quite dramatically. However, age of the libraries also varies and new libraries cannot be expected to have built up as extensive a collection as a library that has a 70 year history.

The director of the Women's Library cites the historical importance and potential future development of the collection as a prime reason as to why the library was successful in winning Lottery money. She believes that:

it was perceived as an, an important nationally significant historical collection, and it, it told a part, the story, a narrative that had not, you know, that isn't always accessible or told. It was seen as nationally significant for that reason. ... [I]t was always the intention to, it wasn't a closed collection and it was always the intention to continue building the collection.

Although many of the libraries have historically significant and large collections, what may be surprising is the lack of formal collection development policies. Whilst the libraries all have criteria with regard to obtaining material only one library (The Women's Library) had a formal written Collection Development Policy, and it is also available online (See Appendix 7).

Several of the libraries apply feminist principles when collecting material. Both the Feminist Library and the Feminist Archive (South) only take material that meets their criteria e.g. it pertains to the women's movement of the 1960s onwards, or it is a novel with feminist content. The Feminist Library, for example, would not take a novel that was written by a woman unless the content was considered to be feminist – a procedure that is relatively easy for a member of staff to assess. Likewise, the Women's Library says:

we don't buy things simply because they're written by women. It has to be ... something which says something about women's lives, for us to want to put it in the fiction collection.

This principle also applies to their non-fiction collection. In contrast, Glasgow Women's Library would take fiction if it was either "by women or about women so it keeps it quite broad".

Whilst there may (or may not) be formalised criteria for stock selection, some of the libraries have never had a budget for the books e.g. Women in Jazz, Glasgow Women's Library. Those libraries that have a fiction collection will often obtain their material through donations. The Women's Library:

tend not to buy too much of fiction because we get given a lot of it, so we can usually meet the requirements for fiction through donation. Because our budget is limited of course, we tend to focus on the more academic publications, of women's history, women's studies, women's biography, and so on.

However, some libraries have to exercise caution over donations, if they are offering contemporary services rather than archive services. For example, at the WRC, they aim to help current women's groups and thus need current information.

We've had odds and sods donated, but the odds that you get donated are last years books, and if we want to be seen as a resource library with a bit of clout we have to get the latest editions.

Donations can cause collection development problems for other libraries, as well as for women's libraries. For example, the material may be in poor condition, or have special restrictions placed on its use, or may not be relevant to the library's main areas of focus. If donations are a prime driver of collection building, as has sometimes been the case in women's libraries and archives, they can also lead to problems of over emphasis in some areas, and gaps in coverage in others (see Pankhurst, 1987).

Where there are fiction collections, there is also debate over whether they should be lending or reference only. Two of the women's libraries lend their fiction collection (the now-closed Feminist Library and Glasgow Women's Library) because

there's just no point to having fiction that's reference only unless they're rare books, because it just doesn't make sense.

However, this causes problems for Glasgow Women's Library as they also house the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre (LAIC). The LAIC is a reference-only collection whereas Glasgow Women's Library is a lending library. There is a separate room for the LAIC collection, and when Glasgow Women's Library moves and raises its profile, it hopes to promote the LAIC resources more. It also now has a separate lesbian resources and services development worker who has responsibility for the collection. But, if the LAIC collection remains as reference-only, the fiction particularly might be underutilised.

Where a library is aiming to meet not only research needs but also provide contemporary material, there are further collection management issues to consider. For example, increasingly, "a lot of campaigning these days takes place in a web environment. It's not necessarily in a printed environment". How therefore, does a library collect this material? This raises questions not only for current collection development policies, but will also affect the nature of current and future collections. The transient nature of electronic material is a problem facing many other libraries, but particularly for those that have an element of being involved with campaigning and contemporary debates. As third wave feminism (see Section 1.11.2 in Chapter 1) is partly characterised by web zines and other ICT media, this has particular resonance for women's libraries that seek to document feminism and provide access to relevant resources.

Again, this relates to a key issue of roles and aims. If the library is to be an extensive, comprehensive archive, it needs to highlight relevant feminist material, regardless of its format. Some institutions may wish to consider how to archive feminist websites whilst libraries looking at serving contemporary needs ought to be able to refer women to a range of potential resources, from books and journals in the physical collection to electronic resources. This relates to the mapping of women's resources (see below) and collaboration issues.

In terms of the collections themselves, many are diverse and extensive. For example, at the Women in Jazz archive, there is

a photography collection, the record collection, the oral history collection that I was trying to build up. You know, there's a lot of formats here, you know? It's not just books.

Along with these items the jazz archive has recently acquired performance gowns worn by female jazz artists. But all these items require particular conservation conditions and expertise – something that is hard to achieve on voluntary and part-time staff and little direct funding. But Jen Wilson notes that:

we're the only one [jazz archive] who's, we've got a multi-media, we're the only one with that in Britain, and Wales hasn't cottoned on to that.

4.7.2 Catalogues

The majority of the women's libraries have computer catalogues (except Glasgow Women's Library and the now-closed Feminist Library), although the catalogues are often not complete (WRC) or are not available to the public (The Feminist Archive). Only the Women's Library has a searchable electronic catalogue that is available via the Internet, and the Women's History Project is an electronic catalogue.

The WRC's computer catalogue is not complete because managing the library is not the Information Officer's main job:

it's probably second to the design and publications, in people's views. I'd like it not to be but, that's certainly the way it's seen. So ... I'm lucky if I get to spend a day a week in the library.

With such limited resources, the libraries are unable to provide the level of service that they may wish to offer or that would normally be expected from any other library in terms of standards of services. Further, the WRC does not

have a cataloguing system in terms of, each book doesn't have a specific number, each book just has a box number....

This is just one example of how the catalogues vary in terms of professionalism or library standards. Most of the staff also admitted to not having ever conducted stock checks (comments that were often made during unrecorded tours of the libraries). An accurate searchable computer catalogue based on regular stock checks is essential, especially if the libraries aim to serve researchers or academics.

The Feminist Archive (South) has various catalogues of its material, including one in Microsoft Access, but they are not available for users to browse so are not useful in a practical sense to a researcher. The staff devised the classification system using the European Women's Thesaurus created by the IIAV, but have not had the resources to extend it to all the material in the archive.

We have a book catalogue, and a pamphlet catalogue, and a poster catalogue, but it's probably just as quick to go straight to the shelves!

...because it's taken us an inordinate length of time, just to catalogue the books, pamphlets and posters, and such like, and that was supposed to be a trial run to see if we could do it. We thought the books would be easy and we'd get the nice new European Women's Thesaurus you know and we'd do it, and it's just taken, you know, forever, to do it. And the object was to find out how to do that, successfully, and then to take all those boxes, archive boxes, of women's material and cross-reference things, so you go and look at [unclear name] box and it's got so and so in it and that cross-references to that, but forget it, that's not going to happen!

With regard to the European Women's Thesaurus, it is interesting to note the commitment of the Feminist Archive (South) to employ a specifically feminist approach for classification and cataloguing. As was noted in the literature review the issue of the inherently male-orientated nature of the major classification systems (i.e. Dewey Decimal and Library of Congress) has been a long-term concern for feminist librarians. For example, in Dewey Decimal, lesbian and bi-sexual material used to be classified alongside paedophilia and incest, reflecting nineteenth century male morals (Ilett, 2003, p. 260). Most of the libraries visited used either Dewey (e.g. the Women's Library), or their own self-devised classification system. The latter were often not constructed for feminist reasons, but often for convenience or suitability to their own collections (e.g. Glasgow Women's Library; the Women's Resource Centre). The Feminist Library created their own specifically feminist system in 1979 but Ilett argues that they failed to promote this, or to engage with either the library profession or feminist networks about the important political stance that they were making by creating a female-centric classification scheme (Ilett, 2003, pp. 289-91).

4.7.3 Use of the collections

The use of Glasgow Women's Library's 'library' collection has diminished in recent years, as other services have developed. But one staff member thought that the books and journals:

[will] come into their own again in the next few years, because it will be, the projects that we have like the lifelong learning and Adult Literacy and so on will ... click up together and materials will start to be used in that context, and the book group as well, it's becoming much more, they're using the materials and they're kind of looking more at what we've got. So that's going to increase again, but ... in a way it's like the basis of the library was the books you know, and, I think that it is sort of coming full circle.

To tackle a decline in use of the library materials, Glasgow Women's Library is trialling satellite libraries, similar to an outreach scheme.

[We] are trying to address, the ... use of the books by having satellite libraries so we're working with Women's Aid and [?] Women which is for sexually abused young women, and like accommodation's there and like taking our books to them, so that they [can use them], ... [and] ... we're trying to increase that to Cornton Vale the women's prison as well so at least they're getting used because at the moment our space is so limited and the way that the library is working at the moment isn't really concentrated so much on that.

Other women's libraries are also trying to broaden the appeal of the collections. For example, the director of the Women's Library states that:

*I've been quite careful to pitch this library not just as a resource for people who are interested in women, women's studies or women's history. Because women make up 52% of the population so most of what is in here is relevant to a whole series of other disciplines, but there are often stories that have been hidden or locked up; there are ways of looking at things that shed a light that hasn't always been seen before, so, I think it's very very important to have the documenting of women's experiences and concerns, ... that's obviously their *raison d'être*, but I wouldn't want ... their use to be interpreted for people who are only interested in that.*

Thus, whilst a collection may be useful for a researcher interested in one aspect of women's history, the library is also trying to draw out the wider relevance of the collections. For example, the records of the National Council of Single Parents are

in the Women's Library but are relevant to more than those interested in women's issues:

[B]ecause 90% of lone parents are women, [the records tell you] how single women who are single parents are perceived, it tells you about adoption, it tells you about women as single parents as workers etc. It also tells you about how a voluntary organisation organised itself, how it campaigned, what its relationships with government were, so you can never just tell women's history, you're telling a whole lot of things around it.

The Women's Library is also looking at how their regular exhibitions can help promote the collections so that their resources are seen as being relevant to more people.

[U]ltimately the exhibition programme is to designed to be a window on our collection, so we would never have an exhibition that didn't show, give an idea of what could be found within the library...

Frequently, such exhibitions will utilise rare or special material that falls into the category of ephemera, as well as the more traditional items of books and journals.

Whilst not having an actual collection of their own that is used directly, the Women's History Project has been able to see its impact on some of the collections that it has mapped. For example, Dr Luddy states that the project has raised the profile of the Taoiseach's papers which were also included in the project and are housed in the National Archive.

[W]e actually have huge chunks of information taken from the [Taoiseach's] files as well, and I think people actually get a better sense of [those] archives. ... And that's a collection that's never really been properly [?]. It's much more widely used now than it's ever been.

Further, several important collections have subsequently been donated to the National Archive of Ireland after being listed by the Women's History Project e.g. the papers of the Girls' Friendly Society. This not only improves access to such archives, but also ensures their preservation. Dr Luddy mentioned instances of rescuing material for donation that was in danger of being thrown out or destroyed through unsatisfactory storage conditions. Thus the Women's History Project has raised the profile and usage of women's history and archives, but also of archives in general.

4.7.4 Role of ephemera

Apart from the Women's Resource Centre, all the other libraries collect ephemera. The Feminist Archive (South) is particularly concerned with ephemera, from the second wave of feminism, but there is the danger that in not actively collecting more 'mainstream' materials i.e. books on women's issues, these too will become lost to researchers or a woman looking for a piece of information. The Feminist Archive (South) does:

occasionally ask for some books that have just been published...but really we've stopped actively doing that ... because these are available, books ... are always available anyway.

However this assumption may not be the case in reality. Discussions on a (now defunct) Feminist Librarians mailing list suggested that books about women or classic texts from the canon of women's studies are not easily available, even in public libraries, and that the librarians were unsure as to what books to obtain in order to build up a collection of such books (the emails are unfortunately no longer unavailable as it was a Yahoo group and no longer exists).

The role of ephemera is important to all the women's libraries (see section 2.3.2 in literature review). Often it is this type of material that is lost, never deposited in libraries or archives and yet is often rich in context and meaning.

ZZ: the important stuff would be all the ephemera of the 70s and 80s,

AT: things that would be harder for someone to find,

ZZ: Yes, so in terms of trying to prise things out of people, it's the ephemera of the 70s and 80s, it's the conference papers, and such like, that people have got in their cupboards somewhere, and we're really trying to get from them now before we, really call a halt [to collecting material].

Women's homemade newsletters, badges, banners etc are not easy items to locate, collect, catalogue and store, especially if few or none of the women working in the libraries have special professional qualifications that would help them deal with this type of material. It takes time to build up collections of ephemera and they are reliant upon women having kept such items, and realising their value and donating them to specific libraries. If a new women's library wished to have a strong archive or historical presence, it would need to create collections of such material, which

could be difficult to accomplish. One of the most oft-quoted items of ephemera at the Women's Library is the return train ticket of Emily Wilding Davison, a suffragette who threw herself in front of the King's horse on Derby Day, Epsom, 1913 and subsequently died of her injuries. Material like this is not only difficult to source, but also difficult to preserve. Yet the combination of women's lives frequently being left out of official documented histories, and their (continued, but fortunately decreasing) restriction to private rather than public spheres has created the situation whereby ephemera and primary sources are vital to documenting women's lives (Beddoe, 1993, pp. 1-15).

In Wales, the AMC/WAW have been active in raising the profile of ephemera and other material that may document women's lives but which is often in danger of being lost e.g. individual's family photos, correspondence etc. Through their recent Roadshows they have endeavoured to raise awareness, particularly among the public, about the value of ephemera and other such material in recording the lives of women, material which is often ignored by traditional history records (see Beddoe, 1998).

4.7.5 Other services offered

As well as the traditional library-based services, some of the women's libraries also offer other services. These include reading groups, discussion groups, cuttings services, consultancy services, free advice services, lifelong learning courses and also an allotment (which Glasgow Women's Library maintains). The three main libraries who offer an extensive range of services are those that fit into the 'community' model as opposed to the academic model of women's libraries i.e. Glasgow Women's Library, the Feminist Library and Swansea Women's Centre. Their extended services are examples of how they reach women in the community, attracting women who perhaps would not use the library and its traditional document-based collections and services.

Whilst the now-closed Feminist Library used to offer community services, there was some discussion at the time of interviewing as to whether they wished to go down

the 'services route'. After the recorded interview with one member of staff, unrecorded discussions with other volunteers indicated that some of the Friends of the library wanted it to continue to concentrate on the 'library' aspect, whilst others saw the extension of services as being a more viable option for the future of the organisation. Ilett also states that the Feminist Library had been encouraged to extend its services and outreach programmes with the local community if it wished to be successful in attracting grant money, but that the collective had decided not to do this (Ilett, 2003, p. 288).

Glasgow Women's Library provides an extensive range of extra services and credits its current success to continually keeping pace with what women in the community actually require. Over the years they have seen the decline in the use of the books and journals, and an increase in use of their other services e.g. lifelong learning courses. One staff member felt that the situation continues to evolve and that the book collection will come back into prominence in years to come (see quote in Section 4.7.3). Being appointed as one of the Scottish Parliament's Linking Libraries has enhanced their documentary and electronic resources and may also provide services that draw in new users (see section 4.7.6).

Some of the services that Glasgow Women's Library provides are similar to a Citizen's Advice Bureau or a resource centre. For example, they:

have a monthly lawyer's service where you can access free legal advice, and a monthly listening ear service as well, where you can get, you know, initial, not intensive counselling, but there is a trained counsellor, and then we have one-to-one support, and a new service that's just about to happen is the lesbian outreach service...

Offering such a range of services is very resource intensive. Glasgow Women's Library also provide a newspaper cuttings service, for a fee, to any member. However, this service is labour intensive and relies upon volunteer staff and is causing some resource problems.

[We] don't know how we're going to address it really because we've got cuttings going back 14 years, so we really don't want to stop it but at the same time, there's just so much you can do, and it's like, at the moment, because the cuttings subscribers have decreased, the revenue is like, about, £20 a month, so it's a [lot of

work]... and currently I think we're about a year behind at the moment, so it's like really, [laughs], bit demoralising really, but, it's just the way of it, you know, you can't do everything... it's a very specialist thing, and if we don't have the woman power to do it, then maybe we'll just have to accept it.

Thus, although services may be worthwhile, the deciding factor on whether a service continues is resources, and ultimately, funding.

4.7.6 Electronic services

There are few electronic services available in the women's libraries. As discussed in Section 4.7.2, only the Women's Library and the Irish project have catalogues that are available to users electronically. Few other electronic services are offered, other than answering email queries. All of the libraries have websites, but these vary in content and currency, and often depend upon volunteers (or family) to maintain them. For example, the Feminist Archive (South)'s website was put together by the main volunteer's step-son, and is kept up-to-date by herself and her husband.

Some of the websites are informative and concise and have sufficient amount of information to satisfy initial enquiries about the resource. The Feminist Archive (South)'s website has additional material such as digitised images from its badges collection and it is also felt that "the website seems to have done a very good job in, publicising the place", and also increasing the number of visitors, particularly overseas researchers.

Other websites are still being created or are very new (e.g. the Feminist Library acquired theirs in 2002/03) or are very thin in terms of information provided (e.g. The Women's Resource Centre). Glasgow Women's Library website was out of date at the time of interview (three years old), but it has subsequently been redesigned and completely updated. At the time of interviewing, whilst the staff were aware and embarrassed about the situation, they lacked the resources (time and skills) to update and amend the site. In Wales, the AMC/WAW had an 'in progress' website although one member said

the website at the moment I'm slightly embarrassed by, because this was literally a first draft, and the person who designed it for

us said 'right, there it is, but, it's very much unfinished'. So there's actually a lot of work that I've got to do ... to get that up and running. But it is there, it does mean people can look at it, they can download joining forms, ...

As yet the website does not provide a database of the collections across Wales that have been deposited under their name. They are keen to provide this facility, although note that another archive organisation (Archive Network Wales) has possibly eradicated the need for them to do it themselves on their own site.

AA: We have the website and it's important that it's, developed, but the idea of putting the archive on the website, has been somewhat superseded by Archive Network Wales. ... Which will be, all archive collections, will go onto it ... well this is what I'm working with [X] with now, so that we've got a compatible programme, process, so that, our, our collections are catalogued in the same way, and therefore go through,

BB: So that you go, you do what I did the other day, you put us in, and all our collections should come up...

By developing external professional links, AMC/WAW may thus be able to save themselves time, money and effort.

The Women's Library's website is the most up to date and informative for a researcher, reflecting perhaps the fact that this is the most securely funded and managed women's library in the British Isles. Another example of an up-to-date website is that of the Women's Resource Centre which has a team of three volunteers who oversee the website, with each person having a specific area of expertise. Although the website is updated weekly, the paid worker overseeing the library information admits to not having much website experience.

[O]ne does design, one uploading and one research, and I email things to them and they just put it on! And that's as much as I know about the website! That's about as much as anybody knows apart from the three volunteers who do, the site! Which is a bit bad, but, you know. It's updated every week, and we try to put on, we try to put on latest books that have come into the library on a weekly basis as well.

The problem for most of the women's libraries with regard to websites is the lack of technical skills among the staff or volunteers. Several have had the website created for them by someone else, but after this person leaves, or once the project is finished, the website cannot be updated as remaining workers simply do not know

what to do. Out-of-date websites may give a negative impression to potential visitors who may then query the currency of the library's other resources and services. Few of the libraries however are able to designate someone, either a paid worker or volunteer, to be responsible for the website. One member of staff at one library said: "I'm not actually sure, who'll be doing the work! It's quite worrying really."

Another worker said:

nobody's really responsible for it [the website] right now. The person who was doing it moved to New Zealand, so we really need to address that and it's on the agenda and it will get addressed in the next few months because we really need to have that up-to-date.

When discussing the likelihood of virtual libraries, all the library staff interviewed felt that physical (*in situ*) women's libraries would still be essential. Quite apart from the fact that few of them offer any electronic services (other than email enquiries), many of the staff felt that women seek out women-only spaces, and that the space and the woman's time in it was as important as the resource or service they came for. Therefore, although it may be possible to deliver some services electronically, the staff felt there would still be a role for actual women's libraries or centres. This is not only because many of the users are coming to the libraries to consult books, printed material or journals that wouldn't be available electronically, but also because the staff believe there is intrinsic value in women-only spaces.

Unlike any of the other women's libraries in the British Isles, the Women's History Project is solely represented to the public via the Internet. The website provides access to search two databases and enables anyone to search for material about a range of topics pertaining to women in Ireland. In terms of its usage, the director of the project stated that:

On average it's about 1000 hits a week, ... , and that's been the same roughly since about 1999. It's just constant. It dips a bit in the summer. And I mean, we've had people from New Zealand, America and all over the place, saying they've used it.

However, because it is only a referral database of where the information is within Ireland, it is not possible to establish how much the actual materials and documents have subsequently been consulted.

4.7.7 'Mapping' of collections

In the United Kingdom, the mapping of collections relating to women has recently been addressed by the Genesis project which is hosted by the Women's Library. Funded by the Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) Genesis is a mapping initiative that aims to identify and develop access to women's history sources across the British Isles⁵. Information is provided via a searchable database which holds descriptions of women's history collections from libraries, archives and museums from around the UK. A total of 46 partners have contributed details of their collections to Genesis (although this figure includes some institutions that have submitted collections from several different departments which then count as separate partners e.g. the British Library). The partners include 28 higher education institutions; four national repositories; 11 specialist repositories and three associations. AMC/WAW is one of the associations. The Feminist Archive (South), Feminist Library, and Glasgow Women's Library are all listed as specialist repositories. The Women's Library is one of the higher education institutions included. Genesis has:

created a kind of map of women's resources, both inside mainstream libraries and collections that don't highlight women's history, and also includes the smaller women's libraries. So that created a good network.

[W]hat we've found with Genesis is that there's all sorts of collections held in other academic institutions and privately, we haven't even done the private ones, but you know, the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, it's in a warehouse somewhere, but you know, there are major collections that are still held by the organisations themselves.

Genesis does not cover the Republic of Ireland, but fortunately the Women's History Project in Ireland has accomplished a similar project, which began just before Genesis was launched. The mapping of repositories in Ireland began in September 1997, recording relevant records that document women's lives. After the

⁵ Although the website says it covers the British Isles, it has been established – see Footnote 1 in Chapter 1 – that the British Isles includes the Republic of Ireland. Genesis does not cover the Republic of Ireland, although one collection from Northern Ireland is included. The correct wording should therefore be that it is a UK-wide project.

initial year, the group successfully won more money for searching of more repositories in Ireland until 2001. A total of just over 400 repositories were mapped in these two rounds of research. Dr Luddy states that at first, many of the repositories wrote back to the researchers saying that they had nothing in their archives that was relevant to the project but that the team was welcome to visit. On visiting, it was found in most cases that there were significant amounts of material that did relate to women's lives. Thus these mapping projects are useful in not only documenting material about women that is possibly already known about by the public e.g. a women's group's archives, but also in raising awareness (among the public and the archive and history professions) that documents that contain evidence about women's lives are not just restricted to particular material, or to material about women who were significant in public life, or who made important achievements.

The grant money for the Ireland mapping project has now ceased, with the project now hosted by the National Archive of Ireland, which Dr Luddy hopes will secure its long-term future. She would like to see future project money being awarded in order to enable further rounds of visiting repositories and private collections to find more material documenting women's history in Ireland.

We update it every now and again, in terms of names and addresses and contact numbers. What we want to do, we're hoping to do this in about two or three years time, is actually get money, maybe on the 10th anniversary, of 1997, to actually get more money to update the actual databases because even since we've done it, there's been lots of stuff, that has become known to us, that wasn't known before we finished.

The success of the Women's History Project is a reminder to AMC/WAW as to what they would like to accomplish. Whilst mapping projects such as Genesis, Archives Network Wales and Collections Wales (the latter of which has been incorporated into Wales on the Web) do cover collections in Wales, having a dedicated mapping of women's collections in Wales is an ongoing ambition of the group.

The mapping of collections, whether achieved by Genesis or other organisations, creates valuable tools for researchers. Such an exercise also presents wider

implications for collaboration and networking between existing women's resources and women's libraries. As will be discussed in a later section (see 4.10), there is very little direct networking between the various women's libraries in the British Isles. The mapping projects therefore highlight the potential for the women's libraries to move out of their own sphere and co-operate with broader related networks or resources.

4.8 Staff

Whilst the staffing levels vary from two to 24, all the libraries rely upon volunteers as part of their staff, with only a few libraries employing paid staff. Although there was great variety in the number of women working in the libraries, a common theme was the lack of professional library or archive qualifications of those working (as either paid staff or volunteers) in the libraries. (The Women's Library was the exception as all its paid staff either had, or were in the process of acquiring, such qualifications.) This situation is changing though. In the summer of 2005, Glasgow Women's Library began advertising for a full-time librarian (35 hours a week) with a salary of £24,432 pa. A degree or post graduate diploma in library and/or information studies was considered an "essential" criterion (Glasgow Women's Library, 2005b, Staff). Some of the key tasks for the new librarian will be the implementation of a library management system and

to research and implement a cataloguing and classification system appropriate to the needs of the organisation, its staff, members and users. (Glasgow Women's Library, 2005b, Staff)

This will overcome the library's current lack of classification system and computer catalogue (see Sections 4.7.1 and 4.7.2) and will help create a more professional image for the library.

Although staff may not have library or archive qualifications, they may possess other qualifications that are appropriate – some volunteers had been teachers for example and are thus familiar with helping people and looking for information. However, in terms of the quality of the services, some staff did worry that their lack of library qualifications might be hindering the development or professionalism of the services offered.

some of the volunteers, have had a background in libraries, but none of us, none of the paid staff have any library training. And I think that's probably why the cataloguing hasn't happened!

I'm not an archivist and therefore this is where this place [has] now, got to the point where it must have some professional care to be of any use. ... [Y]ou're jumping in at the dark and as I say, even doing the catalogue on the computer, we've just devised something which seems reasonable, in Microsoft Access you know, but what a professional librarian would say about it is another matter...

I don't know enough, and that's one of the problems of just being a volunteer, retired teacher doing this stuff, is that I'm not really in the swing any longer, ..., it's not part of my career and I'm not caught up in it, and that's why it does need a young properly trained archivist to get in contact.

The issue of professionalism is important. Some members of the AMC/WAW committee felt that they were not perceived to be a professional group, even though many were respected academics or archivists. In Ireland, the Women's History Project sought to pre-empt claims of amateurism by making sure that:

the people that were employed to do the work, actually were archivists, even though essentially we didn't actually need archivists because we weren't archiving, we were only copying down, we actually made sure that we employed archivists.

The Women's Library is also keen for its staff to possess the relevant qualifications.

We all have library qualifications, [or are] currently taking ... library and information science qualifications, so we kind of encourage that professional development. [T]he university here runs a number of women's studies courses and again some of the staff have done those in the past, or are indeed are about to embark on that course, so, there is both aspects, yes we do want people with library qualifications and we also actively encourage people on staff to improve their knowledge of women's studies.

The additional qualification in women's studies is an important point. Although the women working in the libraries may not have formal library qualifications, they may have qualifications in women's studies or other related areas. The commitment required for working in a women's library means that the person must be dedicated to the ideals of where they work. This is perhaps why many of the workers in the women's libraries, as paid staff and volunteers, have become involved with the libraries after using the services as a member of the public i.e. coming from the

women's side rather than the professional *library* side. For Glasgow, workers often become involved through:

...using the library. And sometimes through direct referrals either through other women's organisations or quite a lot through the volunteer sector, in Glasgow, because we're on their books...

Other libraries also use referral services or use "the Volunteers Bureau, we have adverts there, occasionally we put ads in *The Guardian*, for volunteers".

One library (Glasgow Women's Library) provides specific training for the volunteers, and reimburses their travel costs for travelling to and from the library. The volunteers can join one of four areas of work in the library: Administration, Cuttings, Reception or Research. And at the Women's Library they

...try to take the skills and experience of the volunteer and match that up to appropriate projects in the library. So for example, there's one volunteer who, has, a sort of background in communication, and she works with tour groups. So they don't always come into the library you know, it depends where their strengths are.

Some staff mentioned how they would like to have more volunteers (or paid staff) to help with projects and the work:

I would love to have a paid worker come and do some... of the big, tasks, we have here, you know sorting out the, all the donated books and someone just focusing on that kind of thing.

The number of people needed to manage the workload is important. As one staff member pointed out:

...we always feel that there needs to be more [volunteers], that's always been a problem, because the ones here get very tired really...get really burnt out, so we're always on the look out for someone who'd be reliable and would want to stay for a while.

This element of 'burn out' is important because some of the paid staff and volunteers in some of the libraries have been involved with the organisation for 10 years or more. This is not unusual in women's libraries. Vera Douie, the first librarian of the Library of the London and National Society for Women's Service (as it was then known) held the post for thirty years. Personnel interviewed in Glasgow Women's Library and the Feminist Archive (South) had been volunteers and/or paid staff at the respective organisations for between eight and ten years at the time of

interviewing. The founder of Women in Jazz had been involved for 17 years at the time of interviewing. When this is in a low-paid or unpaid capacity, it calls for a large amount of personal commitment in terms of time, money and energy. This is related to the issue of the women believing in the principle of their work and being committed to it personally; this appears to be especially so where the institution is formed as a collective.

In addition to staff burn out, when an organisation relies solely on volunteers, there can be problems at times with ensuring the continuation of regular access to the library. At the time of interviewing, the Feminist Library had about 10 core volunteers. However, there had been occasions when access to the library was hindered because of staffing problems as can be seen in the quote below:

...sometimes we've had to close the library, if no one can come in. Recently we've had a problem with Tuesday mornings. The usual volunteer got a paid job and, somebody else took over but then she has childcare issues, so we've had, recently, had a bit of a problem.

Unfortunately, this compounds the image of a slightly unprofessional service. Combined with this, is the problem that “people ... , take things more seriously, if there's a paid worker.” Thus the libraries that rely solely on volunteers may be perceived as being less professional or competent, unable to maintain continuity of service which creates a negative impression for funders, users and potential users.

4.9 Clientele

A library being a service institution can justify its existence only when it satisfied the information requirements of its users. Thus users' satisfaction is one of the basic objectives of the collection development of any library. (Panigrahi, 1998, p. 111)

Evidence from the literature of women's information needs highlighted a key problem facing women's libraries and information resource centres. Women, in a variety of different countries and contexts, tend to rely on their informal networks, friends and colleagues when seeking information (see Chapter 2 Section 2.4.6). Few studies found that women went to resource centres, public libraries or even women's

libraries for their information. Given the low usage of the women's libraries (see below), it may be that many women simply do not know about these institutions.

4.9.1 Numbers of users

Some of the women's libraries could not provide accurate statistics on the number of visitors or users to their library although some staff did estimate the number of visitors they had. One member of staff said that user figures were presented at the AGM, whilst another library provided accurate statistics that they kept, but asked for these not to be published or quoted.

[W]e keep them [statistics] for our own purposes, just to see how things are working, and again, the split of who's using us and why they're using us is very useful for planning services.

This quote shows an appreciation of the importance of knowing how many people are using the facilities, particularly so that services can be adapted where necessary. Although some of the libraries felt that numbers had definitely decreased over time, without accurate and current statistics, it is not possible to see which facilities are now less used or where there is scope to develop new services. One library maintains a visitor book, but a volunteer said that they kept forgetting to ask people to sign in, so it wasn't a true reflection of the number of visitors.

The now-closed Feminist Library was, by the end of the 1990s, receiving on average 50 visitors a month, which equates to just over 10 a week. (Ilett, 2003, p. 288). As it was only open three days a week, this is about three visitors a day, which seems somewhat low, and is one possible reason for its closure.

According to Ilett, the newly refurbished and relocated Women's Library received a total of about 3000 people who used the reading room in its first year of its re-opening (Ilett, 2003 p. 257) which is about twelve people a day. There were an additional 15,000 people attending exhibitions and other events at the new Women's Library (Ilett, 2003, p. 258). Ilett remarks that these figures are lower than the estimated 60,000 visitors predicted in its HLF bid as the National Library for Women (Ilett, 2003, p. 319).

Figures for Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) show that a similar number of visitors/week can be achieved on a small budget. Ilett (who has been involved with GWL since 1992) quotes a figure of 15,000 users pa for GWL, which equates to 1250 per month, or about 300 a week (Ilett, 2003, p. 319). However, when I was interviewing the staff at Glasgow they did not have firm figures to hand and suggested it is about "100 plus [per week], including people on courses. But we can get that with email enquiries a week as well". The discrepancy may come from whether women who access the range of lifelong learning courses are classed as library users or not. Certainly, the staff felt that the use of the actual 'library' i.e. the books, had declined over time.

The WRC is unusual in that library use is by appointment only, and visitor numbers are closely monitored. Although the number of visits was quite low at the time of interviewing (when the library had been open about eight months), the librarian hoped that numbers would improve.

[W]e're not a drop-in, and people come in and use us for very specific reasons, they'll come and use us when they are fundraising, or they'll come and use us when they are developing or changing, it's not like a reading or a research library... . [W]e'll probably find that this time next year we'll be really busy when we're well known [by women's groups].

4.9.2 Types of users

The types of women who visit women's libraries cannot be easily categorised. Each library, because of its style and nature, seems to attract different types of women. For example, the Women's Resource Centre is used by women's voluntary organisations and other voluntary sector groups if they have a specific remit for women. It is unique amongst the libraries visited in not serving individual women.

Several libraries are used primarily by researchers and students. For example the Feminist Archive (South) finds that:

... it does tend to be, mostly, PhD students, probably, or Masters degrees, it's probably post graduate stuff on the whole, although we do get some... undergraduates.

[I] think that there are more serious, more academic PhD type people coming now than [there] used to [be] and I think that's a direct result of the website.

The Women's Library finds that:

Because all of our users register, they have to fill in their registration form, and on their form they're asked to specify what their research is for, and most people do mark the box private research... . It's very difficult to break that down, and I think quite a large element of that is probably ... not just personal interest but actually research they're doing, postgraduate level research. So our users are a mixture. That's the largest single group ... we ... have a lot of academics, both from this university but also from other universities and indeed from overseas as well. [W]e have people who come in for work related projects, and we also have school students, and anyone over the age of 14 can use the Reading Room unaccompanied.

In contrast, at Glasgow Women's Library,

...a lot of the users aren't library users, if you know what I mean, they're not book readers, particularly, they're coming for the other services. But I think it's always, because it was a grassroots organisation, I think it always has had a lot of strands and I think that it always has meant that people use it for different reasons, other than books you know, and although books is always a part of it, and the feminist background of the library it's still strong, it's not, sort of, intellectually, you know, used, in the way that maybe idealistically someone was thinking at the start.

Women in Jazz, being primarily archive-based, is also used predominately by researchers, either for private or academic purposes. Both AMC/WAW and the Women's History Project, do not have 'physical' visitors as such as they are organisations with virtual collections, databases highlighting what material exists, and where it is located. They therefore do not know the physical location or any personal details about who is using the archive website, or who might subsequently visit the actual institutions (where possible) to access the specific archives. As noted earlier the website of the Women's History Project is able to count the number of hits it receives, so they have some indication of the popularity of the site and the interest in this field.

The libraries with a community role such as the Feminist Library and Glasgow Women's Library attract women for reasons other than research. As the above quote

explains, to maintain numbers of visitors, the library needs to adapt its services to still draw people in. Glasgow Women's Library has achieved this by developing lifelong learning courses as well as still being a useful resource for academics and research students. At Glasgow Women's Library the users are coming for a:

... mixture of accessing the books, accessing other information, lifelong learning, accessing the projects. I would say accessing the projects is taking up most of the library users. But there's a lot of cross-over there, so women come in having never been to the library thinking that they maybe quite like books and want to get some reading done and then end up seeing a lifelong learning course and before you know it they're doing Tai-chi and wood block printing!

This diversity means that there is no typical user.

[I]t really is Big Issue vendors, women academics, media people, readers. About 60% of our users are from Glasgow, but you don't have to be a member to use the library either, so we have 1600 plus members, but ... most of our users aren't members in fact and you can access the library free of charge, everything's free in the library. We refund any travelling costs for people attending courses, or ...the literacy course. So there really isn't a typical library user at all, they're so varied, they come from all walks of life... out of the ... library users... about 60% are from social inclusion partnership areas, so you know, women living in geographical areas designated as areas of priority really, of social inclusion partnerships.

This emphasis on social inclusion and the community is important to Glasgow Women's Library and has enabled them to draw in and develop extra services such as being designated as a Linking Library for the Scottish Parliament. They see it as important:

... to engage with local communities..., and that's what it's all about, and if local communities have an ownership of that space, they'll use it. But if they don't, and if they go in and it's clinical and you have to be a researcher or academic, that will alienate them.

The re-located Women's Library is also striving to increase the number of local people who use the library, and one method of generating interest in the community is through its exhibition programme. They have found that:

... about 75% of our new visitors have come in through the exhibition, so its been incredibly effective in increasing the number of people who come and know about the collections.

Therefore, whilst acknowledging that they are primarily a research library, they also want to engage with the local community and thus open up the collections to more people. Whilst both Glasgow Women's Library and the Women's Library are engaging with the local community, Ilett found that the (now closed) Feminist Library had a "surprising ambivalence" towards reaching out to its local communities of women, even though funding was more likely to be available if they did engage with the local community (Ilett, 2003, p. 288). Certainly, as has been noted earlier, some personnel at the Feminist Library were against developing services that were not directly related to the library and its resources, unlike staff at Glasgow Women's Library who looked for opportunities to reach new communities by developing new services.

4.9.3 Men

Do women's libraries consider men to be part of the local community and thus one of the target groups they wish to encourage to use the facilities? A common perception of women's libraries is that men are banned from coming into the libraries:

TENS [sic] of thousands of pounds have been given to wacky politically-correct projects - by Scotland's poorest council. Glasgow has a £1 BILLION housing deficit but councillors have given taxpayers' cash to: ... Glasgow Women's Library where men are banned £9,179. (Howarth, 2002, n. p.)

This popular misperception (the quote is from *The Sun* newspaper) of men being banned is not borne out in reality, as the table below shows.

Library	Are men allowed?
Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive Wales	n/a – virtual collection. But, some sensitive collections deposited under their name may have restrictions on access e.g. papers from rape support organisations
The Feminist Archive (South)	No
The Feminist Library	Yes, but not to their discussion group
Glasgow Women's Library	Yes, by appointment outside of usual opening hours
Swansea Women's Resource Centre	No
Women in Jazz	Yes
Women's History Project, Ireland	n/a – virtual collection
The Women's Library	Yes
The Women's Resource Centre	Yes, but not had one yet

Table 2: Access for men in the women's libraries

Although there may be some restrictions on the access given to men, they are only excluded from one archive and the resource centre in Swansea. Women's resource centres were traditionally founded during the Women's Liberation Movement when ideas about separatism were prominent. Further, they often run projects in sensitive areas e.g. rape, thus having men in the Centre may not be suitable. In terms of the physical women's libraries, their policies do not restrict the potential number of male visitors, but the dual barriers of the names of the libraries and the misperception of being banned may prevent men from accessing the facilities.

The issue of male users also relates to staffing. At times, the Women's Library has employed male staff (most notably David Doughan who has also written a variety of papers on women's history). Ilett notes that because the Fawcett Library (as it was known at the time) employed male staff (and had a male Head Librarian from 1988-2000), some women's groups were disinclined to donate their material to it, or to use its resources (Ilett, 2003, p. 245). This was particularly the case in the 1970s and 1980s when feminist thought and action was at its peak. The ideology of separate women's places is evaluated in detail in Chapter 5.

4.9.4 Young women

A further possible reason for the decline in use of the women's libraries could be the rise of the Internet, which may be particularly used by the younger generation of women.

Where are the younger ones? They're there, on the f-word⁶ and they're doing it that way, and it seems to me that yes, there is very much a need. Now that may be all that they want and they're doing it electronically and that's fine.

The *f-word* is a "webzine was founded by, and is mainly written by younger feminists, those of us born during or after the feminism of the 60s and 70s" (the *f-word*, 2005, n. p.). Established in March 2001, it was receiving 35,000 hits a month by September 2003 (Brooks, 2003, n. p.). In June 2003 Caroline Redfern the founder decided, after considerable debate on the site about the issue of 'older' feminists feeling excluded, to change the strapline from 'young UK Feminists' to 'contemporary UK feminism' (the *f-word*, 2005, n. p.). She is keen to stress that its emphasis is still to engage and showcase the voices of younger feminists. The website itself was commended by the Women in Publishing organisation in their annual New Venture Awards 2002 and the founder was listed as one of the top females to watch in 2003 (Brooks, 2003, n. p.). Its aims are to use the *f-word* (feminism) in a positive way, and to rekindle feminist debate on key issues concerning women in Britain today (see screen shot below).

Figure 4: *the f-word* screenshot

⁶ See <http://www.thefword.org.uk/>

Thus, the younger generation of women, born after the second wave of feminism are likely to look for solutions to their information needs electronically, rather than by going to a physical women's library. This is perhaps an important reason for women's libraries to develop their electronic services which are currently fairly limited (see Section 4.7.6).

4.9.5 Friends/Membership schemes

Although some of the libraries have declining visitor numbers, many have a loyal base of support with friends or membership schemes. These schemes provide each library with a ready-made group of interested and like-minded women who can help raise awareness of the individual library. And for some of the libraries the membership schemes are also an important source of income (e.g. AMC/WAW, Feminist Library, Feminist Archive (South), Glasgow Women's Library, the Women's Library) whereas for the Women's Resource Centre "the membership fee is not a money raising revenue". The cost of joining is relatively similar across all organisations, with some operating a sliding scale of fee to match an individual's ability to pay (see the table in Appendix 5).

However, the changing fortunes in terms of visitor numbers is also evidenced in changes in membership numbers. The Feminist Library, for example, had c. 1000 members in 1982, reaching a peak of c. 1700 in 1985. However, by 2000 this had fallen dramatically to 95 (Ilett, 2003, p. 281). In contrast, Glasgow Women's Library's membership has risen from acquiring its 500th member in 1995 (Ilett, 2003, p. 318) to over 1800 today (Glasgow Women's Library, 2005a, Aims).

4.10 Networking and relationships

Networking between women's libraries can operate on several levels. Staff may be networking between themselves, as a group of women's libraries, but also with other women's organisations in the British Isles. There may be potential for networking with other libraries or resource centres in their local area. There is also the potential to network internationally with other women's libraries and resource centres.

Despite this potential to network in different spheres, there was relatively little evidence of networking.

Internationally, some of the women's libraries do maintain informal networks. For example, the Feminist Archive (South) receives items from its international network of women's organisations:

BB: ... we're on the list of various peoples, for example, do you know the WIN organisation, in America?

AT: Women's Information Network?

BB: Yes, Women's Information Network, they send us all their material which is worldwide, so we get South American journals, and so on as well, in return for our little contribution of about one newsletter, and a few other things that we send them ..., [and] there are one or two [other] organisations that we're still collecting from.

Glasgow Women's Library also notes the importance of the network of women's libraries in establishing their own library. The website states that:

The Library is a unique resource in Scotland but has always sought support and links with sister organisations world-wide. Many of the Library projects, policies and initiatives have developed after peer group visits, contacts or discussions. One early inspiration came from exchange visits with Kunstlerinnenarchiv, Nurnberg (now located at Bildwechsel, Hamburg) in 1990/1. ... Over the Library's history we have held hundreds of events, undertaken research, training and partnerships, visited and hosted workshops, conferences and exhibitions. ... We have visited international sister projects as well as making firm links with local and national women's initiatives. (Glasgow Women's Library, 2005, Aims)

In an interview, one worker from Glasgow Women's Library mentioned how she had attended an international conference for women's libraries in 1998 in Amsterdam (the Know How Conference on the World of Women's Information) and found it to be:

... the most mind-blowing conference I've ever been to and the most representative of black and ethnic minority women, and that was really, a really powerful thing... I think everybody got so much out of it... their conferences are held every four years, and I couldn't make it to the last one but I'd like to find out where the next one's going to be and maybe go because I think everybody got so much out of it.

At the time of interviewing, the director of the Women's Library had just recently returned from a conference in India about women's resources in South Asia. Further, when the predecessors to the Glasgow Women's Library were setting up their projects:

they'd made a lot of contacts between '87, '88, '89 and '90, lots of contacts with similar sister organisations, in, Europe, particularly Germany. Glasgow's twinned with Nuremburg, so they made really good contacts that we still have today with women working in the arts and culture in Germany. And what they found in Germany, is, was, there's big support, public sector support for women's organisations and to provide women's spaces and promote women's work, unlike here.

This is confirmed by the literature whereby in 1994/95 there were more than 50 women's archives and libraries in Germany (Dickel, 1995, p. 113). The Women's Library is also involved with "a group of European women's libraries who get together every now and again". But international networking can be time-consuming and as one woman said:

... we've got to sort out how we're operating, day to day, to start with, and then we can start worrying about, what's happening outside Britain.

Moving to a national level, there are interconnections between many of the women involved in related organisations. For example, several of the founding members of AMC/WAW have personal experience of some of other women's libraries and they are also involved in related women's issues and groups across Wales. The same names occur in various circles. It is therefore likely that within the field of women's libraries and related projects in England, Ireland and Scotland there are groups of women that recur across related women's networks. It might be expected therefore, that networking would be well established but this is not necessarily so.

There is agreement that networking is helpful, and Glasgow Women's Library felt that they "work in a really good network with them [the Women's Library], and I think it's very important". There are other instances of networking e.g. Glasgow Women's Library and

... it might have been somebody from Bristol, ..., were trying to instigate some kind of network, where we all maybe met

occasionally, and we're all supportive of that, [but] it sort of lost its momentum... but I think this is something the Women's Library could do... facilitating a network, because it's not like there's that many of us, ..., for us to come together each year and maybe meet and that in the different places, I think that'd be a really positive thing to do, so I'd like to see that happening, but we're all so busy and so skint, or, we can't do it.

[name] and [name] have been down to most of them and things, and [their jobs are] ... a lot more to do with networking and stuff, and when our plans for becoming the Women's Library of Scotland, [X] contacted all the other libraries and there was going to be a meeting about how that would affect everybody...

We don't actively seek it, but if we find we have some duplicate stock then we will try and find a good home for that, at another, er, women's library collection.

Yes, we're in touch, we exchange newsletters with Scotland, with the actual Women's library rather than the lesbian one, but we do send stuff to the lesbian one when we've got it, you know. ... and we're in contact with other organisations, like the feminist, the Older Feminist Network in London and so on, and again this is all email and newsletter exchanges."

We do have, we have one member in Wales, and, we're linked to the library in Scotland, the Glasgow Women's Library, and we share publications and resources, so we don't, in a ... library and information sense there's no restriction there but we can't really offer, huge amount to people [i.e. members] in those areas.

In Wales, AMC/WAW established a relationship with the Women's History Project because "in fact, we did at one stage, because we had contact with Maria quite early on, and we were actually very keen to do the same thing" that is, to conduct a mapping exercise to create a database of women's archives across Wales. Thus, knowing what else was happening in the world of women's libraries and women's archives is important.

However, although there are elements of networking such as sharing of newsletters, email exchange and some meetings, there is not much active collaboration or networking on a practical level. When asked if she thought there was much of a

network between the various women's libraries and archive centres in the British Isles, one woman replied:

No! [emphatically] ... I don't think they're terribly well advertised, and I don't think they're terribly well known. I'm not even sure they know what their target audience is.

In terms of library or archive networks, there is potential for the women's libraries to be involved with professional bodies such as CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals), ASLIB (the Association for Information Management) and the Society of Archivists. However, these networks did not seem to be utilised in terms of raising the profile of the women's libraries within library or archive circles. The Women's History Project and AMC/WAW may both be unusual in their links with archive networks. In the case of the former, they are hosted by the National Archive of Ireland which the director hopes will ensure the continuation of the project. In Wales, AMC/WAW have established working relationships with local record offices and the National Library of Wales to ensure that these locations act as repositories for any material donated under the AMC/WAW name. Thus, the status of the archives and the organisation is raised by having links to the profession.

Aside from these two instances, there appears to be little other engagement with the relevant professions. Women's libraries are rarely feature in library or archive literature (see Chapter 2). They are, to some extent, all moving along their own paths, in their own geographic networking circles. Furthermore, few of the women who were interviewed in each library had visited any of the other women's libraries in the British Isles even though there is a relatively small number of institutions.

Well, the sad thing here is that I actually haven't seen all the other libraries and that's partly because I'm not a full time archivist etc, and this is crazy, ... [although] I actually have been and seen the Fawcett Women's Library [sic].

On a local level, several of the women's libraries are involved with the local community. This is the case whether they are more academic orientated *or* geared towards meeting women's social and community information needs. For example, the WRC is involved in the voluntary sector and they "go out to a lot of voluntary sector events and activities ... promote ourselves." The WRC, with its emphasis on

supporting voluntary groups, hopes to develop relationships that will be beneficial to its clients.

I very much hope that in the next month or two, we're going to get all the voluntary libraries together so that we can start doing a bit. Because there are a few libraries knocking around, an organisation called Bassat [?] which is a research centre, place, and another place does this and another place does that. We've all got specific, we're very small, some of them are even smaller than our library.

Glasgow is also involved in the local community through:

... networking, we're involved with a lot of forums, that comprise ... of, organisations, ..., that include you know different community groups, so there's a West of Scotland lesbian and gay forum, ..., there's a youth network, there's a women's voluntary sector network, there's an adult literacy network. ... [A]nd also we feed into different local authority consultation things as well. [X] is involved in managing a database of women's organisations throughout Glasgow for the Scottish Executive and they pay us to do that work.

Within Wales, the women interviewed all felt that there could be more networking and communication, particularly to decrease feelings of isolation and to facilitate resource sharing. Committee members of AMC/WAW were asked about the level of networking in terms of women's groups and women's resources in Wales. It is interesting to note that during one interview the question was followed by a very long silence, then a discussion of some of the women's groups around, and the suggestion by one committee member that they and other groups represent "survivors from an earlier women's movement". It was noted that there

isn't a network across Wales, of women, of all the different women's organisations, linked to women ... There's so many different kinds. There are things that are specifically feminist and then all the things like the WI and Merched y Wawr and the Town's Women's [Guild], who would probably say that they weren't feminist groups, but none the less, they're very much relevant.

The women interviewed in Wales agreed that improved networks would be beneficial, but they may be difficult to establish.

It is difficult. Because although I work in here all day, all the time, I'm finding it difficult finding who's out there, and I'm hoping that you know, the Archive, Women's Archive of Wales, will sort of, be an umbrella sort of thing where we can all, at least know that it's there and we can use it, and they can come up to us, and be this

two-way traffic thing, 'cos if it's an umbrella, we can all say, look we're here, and this is what we've got, so that they can have this, like a dartboard, where they know, who's out there. And if we want to know something, ..., some group that we've vaguely heard of and can't find, if we could use them as resource as well. Because what the Archive, you probably know what they're doing, is that at least they're logging who's got what where, all over Wales, which is fantastic.

Networks then, in both professional and women's spheres, do appear to be an area for potential growth and development, although inevitably establishing and maintaining viable and valuable networks consumes already pressurised resources.

4.10.1 Relationships between the women's libraries

Networking and relationships between the various women's libraries appears on the surface to be fairly routine. But closer analysis of the transcripts revealed unspoken, or half-hinted at, problems concerning these relationships. These principally revolve around the Women's Library.

One person said that they suspected relationships had changed when the Fawcett Library was awarded £4.2 million and became the Women's Library. Prior to this, all the women's libraries were in similar positions with low levels of funding, insecure project money, in cramped and often inappropriate building conditions, relying upon poorly-paid or purely volunteer staff and with restricted opening hours due to lack of staff. One person commented that the former Fawcett Library had been "in the doldrums" during the 1970s (and this is confirmed by the literature) as there was a rise in costs, decrease in donations and decrease in membership (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 230). The Fawcett Library's HLF grant changed their outlook and ambitions considerably. But, on being asked whether she thought the benefits of this grant to one women's library had trickled down to others, one woman replied "I don't think anybody except the Women's Library has benefited from that." Likewise, another woman commented that "[w]ell I suppose they've [the Feminist Library] been a bit over shadowed by the Women's Library." It was also noted by one woman that with the Women's Library being part of a university it "inhibits people developing ... less formal networks." Other comments were:

Well they're very big and shiny now...

AA: And they're very different, a very different animal really.

BB: And they're very different from the old Fawcett Library I think.

... [a]nd in fact if you go to the building, the library is a very small part of it.

Whilst the women interviewed were all positive in terms of the success of the Women's Library in being awarded a substantial HLF grant, it is possible that the slightly uneasy relationships stem from an element of inequality. For example,

... they've had their lovely million pound grant etc., so they're well in there, and it's difficult to get my mind round how this place runs on nothing...

That is, whilst nothing has changed for several of the women's libraries, the public profile of the Women's Library is considerably greater than it has been in previous decades. Its physical environment has also been significantly enhanced. As a consequence, where there had been some degree of similarity among the women's libraries there now appears to be what could be seen as a two tier system.

A further issue that may have clouded the previously harmonious relationships is the initial replacement name chosen by the Fawcett Library (see section 4.4). This name was not welcomed by staff at other women's libraries.

... I mean, we did get miffed, as did the Scottish women when they [the Fawcett Library] were going to call themselves the National Library. ... Yes, we were at a meeting when that was, that was put forward. And I know, er, we and Scotland did get cross at that point! [laughs]. But they did change it.

For Scotland and groups in Wales, the use of the word 'national' is problematic for two reasons. One is the geographical connotations of applying 'national' to an institution in England and with predominantly English resources. Secondly, the temporary new name also assumed a position as the *only* women's library in the British Isles. To some extent it could be argued that the replacement name of the Women's Library also implies this, as if there were no other women's libraries in the British Isles. Whilst the history and scope of their collections do, to some extent, give them some degree of superiority over the other women's libraries, they are not the only women's library in the British Isles. But, it is unfortunate if this perhaps

unavoidable hierarchy undermines delicate working relationships within a relatively small network of women's libraries.

4.10.2 Marketing

It has been found that the women's libraries appear to have low profiles within women's circles and librarianship. Whilst each library produces a range of marketing materials, including websites, leaflets and newsletters, few have the resources to conduct a large-scale (or even small-scale) marketing campaign. Much of their marketing is in the form of profile-raising articles in newspapers or appropriate journals (see Chapter 2 Section 2.3.5), and in being mentioned in the acknowledgements pages of various books (see Chapter 1 section 1.11). A former member of staff at the Fawcett Library noted that most of their profile raising comes from being acknowledged at the front of many women's studies books (Doughan, 1990, p. 152).

Marketing is most successful when a group is carefully targeted for the information. Given the diverse nature of the users of the women's libraries, the libraries may feel that it would be difficult to create a marketing campaign that would appeal to all the different types of users. Furthermore, without accurate user survey results, it is difficult for the women's libraries to assess who is currently using them, and how to target more people of the same type, or how to attract current non-users.

The women's libraries may also find it difficult to conduct marketing, given the slight dis-engagement from both feminism and librarianship – two networks that would be useful in terms of widening their profile and also reaching new interested members.

4.11 Physical space

Notions of space are important for feminists. In the 19th and (most of the) 20th centuries public space was associated with men, public life and masculinity. Women were mostly confined to private home spheres (Massey, 1994, p. 280, p. 233), with this division of public and private spheres being developed in the mid-19th century

(Massey, 1994, pp. 233-234). As public life (the professions, politics, culture, education) began to open up to women during the 20th century women have moved out of the private spheres and into public space. This brings conflicts and tensions however, as many public spaces are designed by men for men (Edemariam, 2005, pp. 12-13⁷; Matrix, 1984). As a consequence of the previous restriction on women, and their uncomfortableness with public (male) space, women have increasingly sought out women-only spaces. This is mostly seen in the 1970s and 1980s, but was also evident in the early 1900s (at the Women's Service House in the 1930s). Women's libraries therefore represent a conscious decision to create a female space.

The re-emergence of the women's movement over the last 15 years has meant that women have seen the need for, and started to make, new kinds of buildings. ... [w]omen's centres that are both meeting places and advice centres, places for teaching and learning skills previously inaccessible to women... . (Bradshaw, 1984, p. 90)

For the two libraries that fit the 'community' model of a women's library, their physical space is important as they need to be accessible to all types of women and to have a friendly atmosphere. Staff at Glasgow Women's Library stressed (during a tour of the library) that some women may be intimidated by the concept of libraries and have certain preconceptions about the venue or atmosphere, thus it is vital that the library is welcoming and not intimidating.

Five of the seven physical libraries are small spaces and some are single-room entities. Most do not have access for disabled people. Constrained physical conditions are not peculiar to women's libraries:

At present most women's centres and refuges, for instance, are housed in old and badly repaired buildings. Yet buildings help or hinder the development of new ideas in all sorts of subtle ways (Bradshaw, 1984, p. 90).

The exception to the small and often cramped conditions of many of the women's libraries is the Women's Library which was re-opened in an award-winning purpose-built building in February 2002. In moving to a new building the library has been able to not only increase the actual capacity in the library from 10 to 40 users at

⁷ Edemariam's article in the Guardian raises the issue of breastfeeding in public, after a woman was

any one time, but also to house all the material on site (on two floors of storage) as well as create an exhibition space, seminar room and café. From the pictures (below) the library can be seen to be quite different to the other libraries and is similar to an academic library in its design and layout. As one woman said of the Women's Library: "It's much more accessible [now] and there's nice shelving and there's proper tables to work at." The Editor of the *Women's History Review* referred to it as: "[a] sparkling, airy new building, bright and shiny as a new pin, with its wooden flooring..." (Purvis, 2002, p. 165).

Figure 5: The Women's Library – exterior

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Figure 6: The Women's Library - Reading Room

However, some staff at some of the other libraries made off-the-record comments about the physical space of the Women's Library, providing anecdotal comments about women finding it to be cold, hard, unwelcoming and oppressive. This could be countered by the fact that the library is part of an university and as such, is likely to have endeavoured to provide a prestigious and suitably 'academic' environment, which may be unfamiliar to some women. In contrast, the community-type libraries aim to draw in particular types of women, and providing cups of tea, comfy chairs and a more 'homely' atmosphere is more appropriate to their aims. Indeed, research into women's spaces found that:

asked by police to stop breastfeeding on a bench in a street in Norfolk, Edemariam, 2005, pp. 12-13).

the client group in each case emphasised that the place should be welcoming, comfortable and easy to find your way around. (Bradshaw, 1984, p. 99)

A recent development for Glasgow Women's Library is its planned move into bigger and more convenient premises. At the end of 2006 it will relocate to the newly refurbished Mitchell Library in Glasgow city centre. This is likely to increase its public profile and usage. It will be interesting to see what the design and spatial environment on the new location will be like, given its current homely, cosy space.



Figure 7: Glasgow Women's Library



Figure 8: The Feminist Library

Pertinently, the two most recently formed organisations, AMC/WAW and the Women's History Project both elected to operate as 'virtual' libraries, not creating a physical building for archives and women's information, but to concentrate on mapping current material and rescuing it where necessary, depositing it in established libraries or archives. AMC/WAW in particular discussed the resource implications of creating a separate women's library, but it was not considered to be a practical approach. Several founding members also had experience of other women's libraries, which unfortunately sometimes showed the new group how they did not want to develop:

AA: But the other thing is, the Feminist Archive was kind of a lesson for me, in how not to do it. You know, admirable that it is. When I worked there, there wasn't a proper cataloguing system, we were trying to institute, and none of us were really experts in that thing...

BB: You end up making one up yourself...

AA: And, there was such, once you'd been there for a while you found out what a wealth of material there was there, but it was impossible for anybody else who wasn't very much involved with it to know what was there, because there wasn't a good catalogue. We didn't even own a working computer then. Somebody had given us one that didn't work, and we always intended to get someone to mend it, and this sort of thing, you know. Well, so, they would be

given boxes and boxes and boxes of stuff you know, there was no problem about collecting stuff, but it would remain in those boxes for a long time because there was nowhere to put it and no way to deal with it, you know. And of course it was all volunteer labour, you know ...

Thus, whilst it was a ‘dream’ or an ideal situation, to have their own women’s library, the committee of AMC/WAW felt that it was not advisable to pursue the dream, given the problems other women’s libraries routinely experience.

However, whilst these virtual archive collections greatly improve the resources for researchers, they do not address the needs of contemporary women who may have different uses for a women’s library e.g. the courses offered by Glasgow Women’s Library, or the supportive nature of a women’s space. But has the role of a social centre for women diminished with changes in society? The decline in user numbers at the women’s libraries, particularly in those that operate within the contemporary-needs model would suggest that the era for these spaces is passing and whilst there are instances of dynamic women’s groups, women’s publishers, women’s bookshops, feminist debates etc (e.g. Virago, Libertas! – mail-order lesbian books, and the Fawcett Society), maybe there is not sufficient demand to justify creating new physical women’s centres or libraries.

4.12 Conclusions

The findings from the women’s libraries across the British Isles reveal a number of similarities and differences. Whilst their diverse origins, aims and roles create a varied pattern of women’s libraries, their shared financial, managerial, professional, locational and resource problems can be seen across most, if not all, of the organisations.

Declining user numbers in some cases, and even closure of one of the libraries visited suggests, to some extent, that these organisations are no longer viable, or needed. Yet, on the other hand, some of the women’s libraries have growing membership figures, diverse and successful projects and have been awarded

significant amounts of national grant money. Unfortunately perhaps, whilst “you can have the greatest will in the world to do it ... really, it all comes down to money”. The following chapter analyses the findings presented here.

Chapter 5 - Analysis of the findings

The findings from the fieldwork investigating women's libraries across the British Isles were presented in the preceding chapter. In this chapter the findings will be analysed in detail, within eight core themes that relate to the categories investigated in Chapter 4. These themes are:

- identities
- structures
- engagement with librarianship
- communities
- space
- engagement with feminism
- current roles and models, and
- conflicts and tensions.

The options for Wales, and the potential for a women's library in Wales, will be explored extensively in the next chapter, and will be based on the analysis of the findings presented here.

5.1 Identities – origins, aims and names

The sample of women's libraries was diverse enough to provide evidence from organisations founded over eighty years ago, to some that are only seven years old. Several writers (Ilett, 2003, Kramer, 1993,) link the identities of various women's libraries to their era of origin and the type of feminism in existence at that time. By applying this chronological framework to my sample of women's libraries it is possible to place the women's libraries within the three main phases of feminism during the twentieth century, as can be seen in Table 3 below.

Wave of feminism	Organisation (and date of foundation)
1 st wave	Women's Library (1926)
2 nd wave	Feminist Library (1975)
	Feminist Archive (South) (1978)
	Swansea Women's Centre (1979)
	Women in Jazz (1986)
3 rd wave	Glasgow Women's Library (1991)
	Women's History Project (Ireland) (1997)
	Archif Menywod Cymru/ Women's Archive Wales (AMC/WAW) (1998)
	Women's Resource Centre (c.2000)

Table 3: Women's libraries listed by wave of feminism

Using the era of origin and related wave of feminism is useful for considering the engagement each of the women's libraries has with feminism, and for its influence over core identity. Many of the aims of each organisation are grounded in their ideological position, which is often directly influenced by the era of establishment. The significance of this for Wales is whether today's social, political and cultural climate is propitious for the establishment of a women's library. Society's 'backlash' against feminism (Faludi, 1992) and the nature of the (disputed, see Giles & Munford, 2003) third wave of feminism suggest that conditions are not as favourable now as they previously have been. Consequently, developments may need to be aligned with current social perceptions rather than striving to replicate processes that were outcomes of different eras, environments and conditions.

Even though the women's libraries have been established during different periods of feminism and as a consequence of this have different identities, it is possible to discover an element of similarity in terms of their reasons for being established. Each organisation is committed to meeting the needs of women – although this may be interpreted and achieved in a variety of ways. They are primarily services for and about women. This aim frequently underpins their motivation and provides the energy for continued existence; in many of the libraries there appears to be a greater

degree of engagement with feminism than with librarianship. For some, it is evident that they are resources for women that happen to be libraries, rather than libraries that happen to focus on women. This can be seen, for example, in the small number of professionally qualified librarians who work in such libraries, and the relative low priority given to services that are seen as essential in more traditional libraries e.g. computer catalogues and stock checks.

5.1.1 *Changing aims and changing times*

Over time, some of the organisations have adjusted their aims to suit the contemporary social and economic climate. For example, the Women's Library has strengthened its academic focus, whilst expanding its links with local communities; "nor have the radical roots of the old Fawcett Library been forgotten" (Purvis, 2002, p. 167). A key issue is how the various women's libraries have approached this management of change. Some have combined the changes in their aims with changes to their names e.g. from Swansea Women's Centre to Swansea's Multicultural Women's Resource and Training Centre. Others have kept their original name but branched out into offering different services, sometimes with the original aim and name becoming slightly misleading e.g. Glasgow Women's Library which currently operates more as a resource and training centre than a library. Changes in aims, roles and names have principally occurred when new audiences were sought, or in order to attract new funding. Whilst the ethos of the libraries do not change, adapting to a new social, political or economic climate can facilitate the longevity of the women's libraries.

In addition to changing names, there has also sometimes been a change from the original (and maybe idealistic) aims and objectives to operating along more pragmatic lines. In the more recently established organisations e.g. AMC/WAW and the Women's History Association of Ireland, the conflict between ideal and what is possible can be seen in the aim of having their own building and library *in situ*, or, operating as a virtual archive. A contemporaneous organisation of the Irish Women's History Association conducted research into the feasibility of establishing a women's resource centre and library in Dublin. Although they were awarded

money for the feasibility study, the centre was never built. With both the most recently established organisations deciding not to work towards physical women's libraries or archives, citing constant resource demands, staffing and professionalism as key reasons against such action, it suggests that some see the ideal of creating a women's space as no longer possible or practical.

Indeed, some of the women's libraries that do possess their own building face continuous funding and other resource problems. They may also suffer from internal conflict of wishing to serve their community of women as best they can, achieving this in line with their aims and objectives, yet having to exist on limited resources. Thus, the case of providing a specific service (newspaper cuttings) at Glasgow's Women's Library even though it was operating on a loss and was a drain on the resources of the library (see Chapter 4, section 4.7.5). It would appear therefore, that the aims, roles and development of any new women's libraries may well be quite different to their predecessors, given current influences on such institutions.

5.1.2 Names

Services are important to any library, not just in terms of resource implications, but also because they reflect what the library does, who it attracts as users, and because they may also influence the name of the organisation. The women's libraries have often changed their names when there has been an organisational shift in aims and services reflecting changes in society. It was also found in the case of several different women's libraries that during the processes of attracting grant funding the name of the organisations had been changed to make them more applicable, relevant or current. Thus there are internal and external factors that can affect the choice of name for a women's library.

The influence of a chosen name extends beyond external funding bodies to potential users. For example, it was noted in Chapter 4 how the use of the word 'library' may act as a barrier for potential users of Glasgow Women's Library. A woman with literacy problems or with poor experience of libraries may assume, on the basis of the name, that Glasgow Women's Library is not appropriate for her. However, their extensive range of lifelong learning courses and adult literacy programmes are

services that perhaps might be what she needs to develop personally. Women's libraries therefore need to consider their nomenclature carefully.

Further, whilst their nomenclature may have an affect on the potential users, it also sends out signals to the professional library world. Some of the women's libraries are not structured along traditional management lines, and the different management styles may be unfamiliar to others working in traditional libraries. In addition, in using the word 'library', they are creating an image that they sometimes do not match, and inviting comparisons that may be unfavourable. Although there is very little literature on women's libraries (see Chapter 2), what does exist within the traditional library field, may expose the weaker 'library' elements of the women's libraries e.g. few computer catalogues, unsuitable storage facilities, out-of-date web pages, and may detract from the valuable services and collections that the organisations do provide. Furthermore, if the women's libraries are discussed in the field of women's studies, there may be similar but different problems in that some women's studies journals are quite philosophical, theoretical and academic in nature, yet some of the women's libraries represent grassroots elements of feminism, and may not be heavily engaged in theoretical debates e.g. Swansea Women's Centre or the Women's Resource Centre in London.

Whilst many of the women's libraries or archive organisations have changed their names over time (see descriptions in Chapter 3), changing names too often can confuse potential and existing users. However, name changes may be necessary so that the aims and services of each organisation correctly match their name and identity. Thus, those whose aims are focused primarily on meeting contemporary women's needs may well be better named as 'women's centres' or 'resource centres' rather than libraries. This might not only overcome some of the potential barriers associated with the word library, but might better describe their services and aims. It may also deflect critical attention away from any services or operations that may not be seen to be relevant or pertaining to traditional notions of libraries.

5.2 *Structures: management and funding*

In a similar manner to the tension between ideal aims and ambitions and achieving what is practical or possible, there is also evidence of conflict between wishing to adhere to core principles or values whilst still offering an appropriate service. These values or principles are often related to structural issues such as the management style of the organisation. Thus, for example, the Feminist Archive (South) was established as an independent feminist collective, but it is currently looking at the possibility of having a more secure basis by becoming part of a local university. This could potentially improve access to the collections (currently only available one mid-week afternoon) and their long-term security and preservation, but, it could also mean a loss of independence and a diminishing of the feminist principles which are closely integrated with the collection. Questions need to be asked therefore as to whether the collections themselves are the most important issue, or, are they only *part* of what it is to be a feminist library.

Many of the interviewees acknowledged the resource implications of being independent, or operating either formally or informally as feminist collectives. In the early days at one library “people were putting their rent money into the library to pay the library’s rent.” Maintaining a collective can involve a high degree of personal commitment to the organisation, such as unpaid overtime (Oerton, 1997, pp. 214-216), insecure jobs, poor working conditions, and lack of clearly defined management structures.

... often what happens with these local initiatives is you end up with people volunteering, which, again, the old thing, women volunteering, not getting paid, the professionalism of the whole thing is lost.¹

A situation where staff are over-working voluntarily or are putting their own money into the organisation is unsustainable, and is highly unlikely to happen within a different library setting e.g. a business or academic library. It is this lack of professionalism that may foster an image of ‘amateurs’ and which may also lead to the image of the collections being of little value. This again highlights the conflict

¹ As with Chapter 4, anonymous quotes in the text are from the interviews.

between being engaged with librarianship or having a greater commitment to a cause or *raison d'être*, in this case, women's issues.

In addition to the reliance upon volunteer or non-professional staff, Mount outlines how in small special libraries, staff may be expected to fulfil a number of varied duties. Whilst this can provide an interesting work environment, it also can lead to increased managerial responsibilities (Mount, 1995, p. 33). These management responsibilities may include reporting and dealing with a high level of management, planning, budgeting, organising staff, supervising, marketing, public relations and evaluating operations (Mount, 1995, pp. 34-35.) If the member of staff is not qualified in these tasks, there may be operational inefficiency, particularly as:

One of the most important factors in developing successful special libraries or information centers is the quality of the management under which they operate. (Mount, 1995, p. 32)

In the case of the women's libraries, it is possible to identify where organisations are being run by enthusiastic women who may be unqualified in librarianship or management skills. It is relevant to note therefore that the appointment of the first director of the Women's Library brought in someone with previous management, promotional and leadership skills.

This change in management style of the women's libraries from collectives to more traditional structures could be seen as part of the institutionalisation of alternative structures (Bordt, 1997). Bordt argues that although the idea of co-operatives and collectives is not recent, the rise in their numbers in the late 1960s and through to the mid-late 1970s was a result of the contemporary social and political climate. The decline of the Women's Liberation Movement and political and social 'backlash' (Faludi, 1992) challenged the nature of collectives which have subsequently adapted their management styles to suit a different climate. Thus, newer organisations often do not feel compelled to organise along collective lines in order to achieve their objectives (Bordt, 1997, pp. 147-148).

For those women's libraries attached, or possibly moving into university collections, or funded by local councils, there are other management issues to consider.

universities and councils do not necessarily provide dependable guaranteed incomes.

Thus:

Special libraries, ..., are vulnerable to changes of outlook about library services when different people occupy top management positions or as economic conditions dictate belt-tightening in an organisation. (Mount, 1995, p. 6)

Several of the women's libraries have experienced the effects of such belt-tightening in their pasts (see Section 3.10 in Chapter 3), and thus flexibility and ability to respond to change are all important management skills needed by the staff at the women's libraries.

5.2.1 Funding

As with management structures, funding issues underpin the nature of the women's libraries and archive projects.

You can have the greatest will in the world to do it ... but really, it all comes down to money.

Despite the variety in sources of funding found at the women's libraries, no sources are particularly secure: donations, membership fees, project grants, or university revenue funding all have their own disadvantages. In several cases, the lack of secure financial resources of the women's libraries has a negative impact on the effectiveness and range of services the libraries can provide. Not all the organisations can afford to pay their staff, or to pay them within recognised pay scales; not all the organisations are able to set aside money for a specific book budget; not all the organisations can afford to implement stock checks or maintain accurate computer catalogues; and not all the organisations can afford to be open five days a week. Without the financial ability to provide easily accessible collections, or to develop existing or new services, the libraries are unable to plan for future growth. It is also questionable how accessible and beneficial they are in terms of their spheres of influence given their limited resources. With such constrained resources, their collections may continue to be underused and undervalued.

As discussed in Chapter 4, there may be an overall decline in user numbers, or a decline in the use of a particular service, but such changes did not appear to have

been evaluated or analysed. And whilst staff in several of the women's libraries blamed decline in use on the loss of women's studies course at universities, none suggested that they had done some research to see if this was actually the case.

Furthermore, where project money was coming into the libraries, it was not clear if they had to report back to their funders. In the case of the Feminist Library, they were required to provide minutes of meetings and some statistics to the local authority. However, they did not appear to keep many specific statistics regarding use of the collections, and it may be questioned as to whether the decision by the local authority to withdraw funding the library's funding was partly due to its lack of evidence showing that it *was* valuable to either local or national communities. In contrast, the Women's Resource Centre conducts formal evaluation of its library services in order to provide feedback to its funders.

[O]urs is more about, our evidence we have to provide to our funders is 'what good that service did to them'. Not physically 'how many people did you have through the door?' but ... how else has the library helped? ... [O]ur funders are always more interested in, 'did that person get funding from coming in and using our library?' Not necessarily twenty people coming in and looking at one book....

This is an important consideration: rather than knowing that 10 people came to use the library, for example, the success of each visit or the type of information that was found and utilised is more useful for the library in its subsequent development of services. No other library gave evidence of similar forms of user surveys. For librarians working in traditional public or academic libraries, this would appear to be at variance with commonly accepted good practice. (For example, Information Services at Aberystwyth University conducts annual user surveys, offering a prize draw as an incentive for completing the survey.)

It is also important to note how funding can influence what services are offered. For example, one women's library offered services:

... within the limits of what's fashionable for funding and all that kind of stuff, you know, you can't really do exactly what you want but you always try and make it fit in to, you know, sort of broad [rules ?], and making sure that people are coming in the door.

Funding bodies, be they local authority councils, arts and culture bodies or universities have quite a powerful influence over the type of women's libraries and archive projects that currently exist. Being able to offer projects or services that match the current social and cultural climate is therefore critical for successful funding bids. In 2001 The Scottish Parliament published a report (*Adult Literacy and Numeracy in Scotland*) and began a national initiative to address low levels of adult literacy and numeracy in Scotland. The report found that about 20% of adults in Scotland have 'poor skills' and a further 30% may find their skills inadequate in the knowledge economy. This equates to about 800,000 adults in Scotland who have very low literacy and numeracy skills (Scottish Parliament, 2001, section 3.2). The strategy to tackle this includes spending £51m over a 5-year period (Scottish Parliament, 2001, section 3.2). Glasgow Women's Library, by offering lifelong learning and adult literacy services to a variety of disadvantaged groups (e.g. ethnic-minority women, young female adults, women from disadvantaged urban areas) are thus able to be involved in the national campaign and attract some of the funding. This in turn increases their engagement with the local community – an issue which is discussed in section 5.4.

Given some of the problems with funding bodies, some libraries have sought to stay independent. But is being independent and relying upon fluctuating grant money a viable option for an efficient library or archive service? One participant said

woe betide anybody who would try to do something on this scale and try to be independent. Now there are models of places that are [independent] but, but, they have local authority support so somewhere like IIAV in Amsterdam has very, strong regional support. There are different ways of doing it, but you have to have a revenue stream that is pretty assured I would say for a substantial amount of your running costs.

However, others would argue that

[B]ecause we've never been funded by a council, we've always had to get our own funding, it's meant that to survive we've always had to look for different sources of funding from different places, and although that's meant really low wages for a lot of the workers, a lot of the time, er, it means that we're totally independent and that we run our own show, basically.

It is clear that despite the variety in sources of funding, no sources are particularly secure. Relying on membership and services income gives a library a slightly greater degree of independence, but may be problematic if there is a decline in membership over time, and if funds from services also decline. This vicious circle has been experienced by the Feminist Library and eventually contributed to their closure. Alternatives such as project grants or university funding bring their own disadvantages and may not be applicable to all the women's libraries.

5.3 Engagement with librarianship

There is no doubt, when one considers the range of the collections either housed by the various physical women's libraries, or referenced on databases of archives, that there are a number of significant and immensely important collections and resources connected to the women's libraries. (See Chapter 3 Section 3.10). However, as has been discussed earlier, some of the libraries have limited resources (particularly people and money) with which to develop the collections, ensure their preservation, or to promote them effectively. There are also several areas within collection development and service provision that call into question the professionalism of the libraries. This dis-engagement with professional standards and methods is perhaps one reason for their low profile within the library world i.e. among librarians and in the professional library literature.

Although some services may be worthwhile (e.g. a newspaper cuttings service) sometimes the deciding factor on whether a service continues is resources, and ultimately, funding. Although this could be considered to be the same for any library, public, academic or business, it seems that this key issue of what it is to be a *women's* library is essential here. What professionally run library would consider continuing a service when it was uneconomical and a drain on resources? In many instances, women's libraries continue to provide services that are resource-intensive, primarily because of their core values and concentration on *women's* issues, as opposed to *library* issues. That is, there is a stronger engagement to feminism or women's issues than with librarianship.

Another element of the dis-engagement from librarianship can be seen in the lack of formal standardised classification systems in place in the women's libraries. Of the physical collections (i.e. excluding the work of AMC/WAW and the Irish Women's History Project, both of which adhere to archive standards), only one library used a traditional classification system (The Women's Library). One library had partially implemented a system based on the European Women's Thesaurus, whilst another had devised its own feminist classification system. It could be seen therefore, that there is a double dis-engagement from librarianship in that not only do they not employ 'traditional' library classification systems, but they are not overly concerned about applying any other published classification system, even if it has been designed with women in mind. At the time of interviewing Glasgow Women's Library did not have a catalogue system in place, or a classification scheme, but, in a recent (August 2005) job advertisement for a librarian, it was stated that they were looking for someone who would identify a suitable library management system and to catalogue the collection. It will be interesting to follow the developments to see whether they implement a feminist classification system or not.

The dis-engagement from librarianship however, does not just stem from their identities or aims. It is also related to the lack of financial security. Few of the women's libraries are able to offer easily accessible, professional services and collections as few of them have secure or specific funding. Few have specific book budgets in order to augment the current collections and few have specially trained professional staff who can ensure adequate conservation measures are practised. They are therefore less able to deliver what might be considered to be a professional service. Their principles, guiding ethos, and restrictive resources all combine in creating relatively isolated organisations, that appear to operate not only outside of library circles, but also do not appear to be within the spheres of influence of women's studies.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, women's libraries, whilst displaying some similarities with special libraries and electronic directories (but not the full range of services expected from a digital or virtual library), are not closely integrated into

either of these two sectors, either in the literature or in common daily practices. For example, St Clair argues that there has been a change in the role of a librarian in special libraries from general and traditional services and provision to specific and high-tech information delivery (2001, p. 44). Their key skills now are knowing about the capture, organisation and dissemination of information and an understanding of how information is used, and how the work they do contributes to the organisation's success (St Clair, 2001, p. 48). Most of the librarians in the women's libraries are not producing tailor-made, user-focused information services, which often operate on the 'just in time' approach (Eastwood & Thompson, 2001, p. 6), whereby materials are not to hand unless (or until) they are needed. St Clair argues that this approach shows that "...special librarianship is less about collections and more about information delivery" (2001, p. 56). In contrast, the women's libraries operate along more traditional lines of collecting and providing information. For many of them, the material and collections *are* essential to their definition, especially where they have significant archives.

But in other respects, women's libraries do have similarities with special libraries. Mount describes some typical functions of the latter:

- May be one-person libraries
- Tend to have a very particular or narrow subject focus; specialised collections
- Relatively high reliance on non-book material e.g. reports, slides
- May provide intensive and tailor-made services for users c.f. general services of public libraries with a limit to the lengths gone to to find information for a user
- Very knowledgeable staff on the subject area
- Often at forefront of using technology
- May have higher salaries than public and academic librarians
- Most are voluntary in terms of establishment c.f. public libraries
- Serve small group of relatively fixed numbers of users c. f. public libraries serving wide cohort (Mount, 1995, pp. 4-18).

From this list we can see many similarities, but also some differences, between special and women's libraries. For example, most of the staff of women's libraries are under-paid, if they receive a salary at all, and few of the women's libraries have been able to take advantage of new technologies. Although the focus in the literature tends to be on commercial or 'workplace' special libraries, the generic issues of staffing, funding (the workplace library is often subject to budget cuts, (Mount, 1995, p. 6)), management and low usage could enable women's libraries to forge closer links with special library associations or networking groups, and to try to be represented in this literature.

Given the recent developments in the newer models of women's libraries and archives (e.g. Women's History Project Ireland and AMC/WAW), it could also be possible for such organisations to develop an engagement with the relatively recent development of virtual libraries. However, as was outlined in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.10) none of the projects studied here could be considered as virtual libraries, and the modest to low-level electronic developments in the other women's libraries leads to a hesitation to refer to these as hybrid libraries. Eastwood & Thompson consider that the digital library, can mean at its most basic, electronic format rather than or as well as, paper format (2001, p. 5). Whilst the women's libraries all possess web pages, few offer electronic services, or even electronic catalogues. Thus whilst the older women's libraries appear to be more aligned to special, public, or academic libraries, the newer models are neither virtual libraries or digital libraries, tending, currently, to exist as directories and portals guiding users to the original hard copy documents. Their engagement with librarianship and the archive professional, whilst possessing the potential for development in a variety of sectors appears in most areas to be limited and reluctant.

5.3.1 Staff

It was found during the fieldwork that many of the volunteers and paid staff in the women's libraries do not have professional library qualifications. Some do possess other relevant qualifications e.g. in women's studies. But, it could be argued that by having few qualified librarians, the services, collections and overall image of the

organisations are adversely affected. The exceptions to this situation are at the Women's Library where all their staff are professionally qualified librarians or archivists or are currently undertaking training in these professions, and Glasgow Women's Library who have recently appointed a qualified librarian. The lack of staff with library qualifications was also found by Ilett in her research into women's health centres in the UK whereby only one out of her sample of 20 institutions had a qualified librarian (Ilett, 2002, p. 37).

One possible reason for the lack of formal library qualifications among staff in women's libraries could be that many of the staff and volunteers join the organisation's staff team (paid or unpaid) having previously been a user of the library. Thus they are likely to be working out of personal interest rather than a professional motivation. Again, this confirms the finding that the libraries tend to have more engagement with feminism than with librarianship.

However, there is a danger that the attraction to, and interest in, women's issues can lead to some women investing heavily in the 'cause' such as a women's library. Evidence was given in the interviews of the personal commitment in terms of time, money and energy many women make to such causes: the danger of this is 'burn out', and in addition, in small organisations that are dependent upon a few dedicated volunteers or staff, if or when these key personnel leave, there can be a gap that is hard to fill. Not only their knowledge of the organisation disappears, but also the drive and motivation to keep the organisation going. For example:

AT: So the original one, when was that established?

LL: I don't know, nobody seems to know, there doesn't seem to be anything...

AT: Nobody's here that was there,

LL: No, nobody is more than two years in employment here,

CC: They were actually in [name] town hall before that. They were in [place] just before that. They've moved quite a lot actually. And it's quite difficult because there's not really anybody still around who's done it the whole way through and there's not been a great record kept.

AT: So you don't know how things used to...,

CC: There's not a clue, a transition of how things happened. I mean there's enough people around who can go this this and this, but, there's not really... that clarity.

This is a key element of knowledge management, how to capture the tacit knowledge of employees so that the organisation can benefit. "Knowledge is increasingly the most important asset an organisation possesses" (Munn, 2001, p. 164). Competitive advantage for organisations lies in their ability to access and exploit the information and experience (knowledge) stored in employees' heads (Munn, 2001 p. 159). This tacit knowledge (c. f. explicit knowledge which is recorded or noted somewhere) is lost when employees leave, and without it, organisations can be at a disadvantage.

During the interviews it became evident that there is an element of tension between women who are committed to the cause and the principles of the women's libraries, and those who work in women's libraries or archive organisations but who are committed to the job from a library or archive perspective. In unrecorded conversations two women made comments suggesting that some staff at the Women's Library were mainly there just because it was a job, and were not that interested in women's issues. Comments implying the reverse were also made by other staff suggesting that some women were more interested in women's issues than the value of archives or information resources. This highlights the conflict between the engagement with librarianship or with feminism. Should the balance between the two matter? A librarian working in, say, a business library, is unlikely to be questioned on their commitment to that business field. However, it may be possible to extend the 'commitment' argument to other 'specialist' libraries or resource centres such as charity organisations. For example, the Oxfam library in Oxford may well wish to employ staff or volunteers who are interested in and committed to the principles of Oxfam.

From the interviews and off-record conversations, it appears that there are some hinted-at beliefs that anyone working in a women's library must be dedicated to women's issues. This tension causes those more concerned with library issues to refer negatively to those concerned with women's issues, and vice versa. This

cannot be healthy in the relatively small world of women's libraries. It may also reflect the broader division within feminism as a whole between academic feminist thought and grassroots feminist action (Kemp & Squires, 1997, p. 5; Evans, 1982, p. 17; Gillis & Munford, 2003).

5.4 Communities

The Scottish Parliament has noted the valuable roles libraries play in their communities:

... libraries have great potential as community hubs and that their outreach and social inclusion functions are vital and often overlooked and [the Scottish Parliament] applauds those libraries that are imaginatively tackling these important issues. (Scottish Parliament, 2003, Section 4)

With government recognition for outreach and other projects, places like Glasgow Women's Library are able to improve the lives of local women whilst also potentially attracting national funding and support. This engagement with the local community may then create further opportunities in the future. (For example, with reference to Glasgow Women's Library, they have successfully negotiated a relocation into a refurbished city-centre reference library, thus increasing their public profile, space, professionalism, and long-term security).

It might also be possible to relate the degree of engagement with the local community with those libraries that have the most secure future and the most diverse collections. For example, a library with a large and diverse collection may be able to attract and interest a range of different communities for support and patronage. For example, one interviewee said that

I think this library is very strong because it has a research collection, and collections of national importance, and that combined with, we have those collections but we've also very actively been collecting material of, campaigning groups, sort of small organisations, ephemeral materials, things that don't go into the mainstream, the big mainstream libraries, so we've got this nice combination of the historical collection plus a lot of the contemporary and Women's Liberation Movement stuff.

By being able to appeal to different people, the library may also be able to appeal to different funding bodies to support different projects, and, should therefore be able to increase the potential number of visitors. However, the nature and aims of some of the libraries' collections precludes such diversity e.g. the WRC whose remit is to serve women's voluntary groups, and the Feminist Archive South whose remit is to collect material only from the second wave of feminism.

5.4.1 *Clientele: Users and Membership*

Of primary concern to most of the women's libraries visited is the decline in users to the libraries, although firm statistics are difficult to obtain, given the lack of professionalism (see section 5.3), and a degree of secrecy (e.g. one library provided me with statistics but asked that I did not quote them).

As was shown in Chapter 4, there was considerable variety in the numbers of users coming to the libraries each week, with the totals ranging from 1 to 100 (see Appendix 4) Whilst some of the libraries may have fairly buoyant user figures, personnel at most of the libraries said that there had been a definite decline in the number of users coming to the libraries. As few of the personnel in the various libraries were able to provide accurate current user statistics it is debatable whether it would be possible to trace their usage patterns over time to compare with earlier usage figures. Without statistical evidence, it is difficult for researchers to fully understand the situations, and for personnel in the libraries to plan services and staff provision.

The under-use of women's libraries in general is an issue, particularly when linked to their future existence. Observation of the libraries at the time of each interview revealed that only two of the libraries were being used by other women. Where libraries are funded by external grants or projects, low usage figures may well prompt the funders to reduce or withdraw their support.

Low usage figures also raise the question of the continued importance of such institutions, and their ability to survive on small budgets.

I think part of our problem [of declining user numbers] is that we don't publicise ourselves enough, and that's through lack of resources, and lack of volunteers to do it.

Are declining numbers due to low profiles and lack of public awareness about the resources available? Or is it evidence of a wider problem with women's issues and feminism, in what some refer to as the post-feminist age? (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, pp. 105-108.) Several members of staff put the decrease in numbers down to the reduction in women's studies courses.

I think it's basically because women's studies courses don't really exist anymore. I mean there's gender studies and other names for it, but it's very different, the culture's very different than previously, and I think you do have to adapt to that, as well, I don't think you can continue to be your focus on that, if, people aren't coming, I think you do have to do what you can.

BB: I think it's to do with all the women's studies courses being cut, ..., It's quite sad.

AT: Why do you think they're cutting them?

BB: It's not fashionable any more, [maybe they] want to save money, and if they do have a course now it's more likely to be called gender studies, and have a different emphasis, a more sociology emphasis, than original women's studies courses.

... we did have quite a lot of visitors, ... in the years before the courses were cut, and before that it was women who wanted to read books and were more likely to identify as feminists.

Glasgow Women's Library acknowledge that they had seen a decline in numbers, but this has been reversed with the provision of a number of lifelong learning courses, adult literacy courses and other outreach schemes. It could be seen therefore, that the traditional 'library' services are in decline, possibly as a result of the decline in women's studies courses, but that there are still instances where individual women today are seeking information or resources in a female-only environment.

The widespread decline of visitor numbers attributed to the cutting of women's studies courses and the subsequent focus on gender studies in academia needs further investigation. As few of the libraries have kept user statistics or conducted user surveys, the reasons for the use in previous years can only be guessed at, based on what users asked for or what services they used. Thus, the staff may be able to

conclude that in the past they were, for example, used primarily by students of women's studies courses. From my research it seems that there are still a number of women's studies, women's history and gender studies courses across the British Isles (see section 2.3.9.1 in Chapter 2). It is interesting to note that in Wales, whilst former women's studies courses have closed, two institutions still offer this subject at Masters level. The University of Swansea's Gender & Culture MA course started in 2004 (see Appendix 6).

However, whilst the provision of about 20 different courses may seem adequate, this is considerably fewer than in the mid-late 1980s or in the 1990s². This decrease in the number of courses offered, and shift in focus to gender studies, matches the overall (public) decline in interest in feminism within society and a concurrent move away from notions of separatism and an absorption of women's issues into the mainstream (Hudson, 2001, n. p.). For example, the independent feminist publisher *Virago* has become part of the Times Warner publishing/media conglomerate. The decline in provision of women's studies courses is also evidence for the debate over whether we are now in a 'post feminist' period or a third-wave of feminism (Gillis & Munford, 2003, pp. 1-2; Redfern, 2001, n. p.) where separate organisations for women are no longer needed. Both are severely contested notions and the subject of much debate (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, pp. 147-151; Wolf, 1993).

There is also the question of who are the users of women's libraries. Whilst several of the women's libraries said it would be difficult to define a typical user, they do tend to fall into two categories: either researchers (private or academic) or 'contemporary' users accessing courses or training sessions. This matches, to some extent, the two main models of women's libraries. But without accurate or regular user surveys it is difficult to fully categorise the users. It is important that libraries know who their customers are, and what they want.

To serve a population group effectively, information workers must understand its information needs and its information-seeing habits.

² Griffin & Hanmer cite a 1993 handbook of women's studies which listed 74 women's studies courses in the UK, 47 of which were full degree programmes (Diploma, undergraduate or postgraduate level). (Griffin Hanmer, 2001, p. 24)

... *The role of research in establishing the information needs of women cannot be overemphasized.* (Mbambo, 1995. p. 47)

Knowing the users is essential if the most appropriate services are to be offered. Few of the women's libraries know who their customers are and unfortunately, few of them have the necessary resources to conduct customer surveys. In terms of increasing user numbers, they might also be interested in non-users, particularly from the local community, who could be attracted to the organisation. A lack of resources for research, marketing and profile raising however, makes both of these difficult to achieve. Research into the use made of all the different women's libraries is therefore a potential area for future investigation.

Different libraries have different experiences with regard to their membership numbers. The importance of successful membership schemes is not just the financial contribution to the libraries, but also their wider influence, and the picture they reveal. Buoyant membership figures suggest a successful library, and this can influence funding decisions. Likewise, the reverse can equally apply. The individual members may also have important connections or networks and may be able to raise the profile of the library within their own circles which may bring wider cultural and professional recognition. For example, the Association of the Women Barristers holding meetings at the Women's Library (Ilett, 2003, p. 239). With friends and connections such as these, the Women's Library is able to distance itself from the typical image of women's libraries, which has been described by *The Sun* newspaper as "wacky" (Howarth, 2002, n. p.), and thus create a more professional image for itself.

5.4.2 Networks

At a keynote address at the 2002 Kampala Know How conference, Devaki Jain noted the importance of women producing and sharing their knowledge. She emphasized that networking was a special feature of the feminist movement that brings collective perspectives of issues and gives a collective voice (Know How Conference, n. d., p. 28). Despite an active international network of women's information services, there does not appear to be active networking in the British Isles.

The disappointing lack of networking among the various women's libraries was discussed in Chapter 4. It is, unfortunately, not a recent occurrence as Renshaw, conducting Masters level research in 1989, found a similar lack of evidence of linkage (Ilett, 2003, p. 282). There are several possible explanations for this. One is that there are greater expectations of women's organisations to network together as women are often seen as good networkers (Rhys, n. d., n. p.) and with only a few players in a small field, it could be expected that there would be well-established links. In addition, the degree to which each women's library is engaged with feminism varies across the organisations. Those that perhaps have a closer attachment to feminism or women's issues (such as the Feminist Archive, Glasgow Women's Library and the now closed Feminist Library) do appear to have maintained low-level networks, with exchange of newsletters and some of the staff knowing each other. The libraries that are perhaps more engaged with library (or archive) issues, are thus one step removed from the women's networks and may see it as being more important to establish links within the relevant profession than with other women's libraries or archives. An example of this is the Irish Women's History Project which is hosted by the National Archive of Ireland.

Again, the common thread of the conflict between being a library or being a resource for women is critical here. Being outside formal library networks, the women's libraries have few other structures on which to base networking or sharing information about their collections. Although collaboration would be resource intensive, and in their current circumstances, few of the libraries could begin to establish a nation-wide networking project, in remaining relatively isolated, each library is left without a wider support structure. The diversity of the collections is also an important consideration. Whilst they all can be loosely termed women's libraries or women's archives, many of them see themselves as lone inhabitants of a particular field, thus reducing the potential for networking.

One possible reason for the lack of networking may be that although the various women's libraries all have specific and different collection scopes, they are all interested in broadly similar resources.

*I suppose they're in competition. For funding. For materials.
Do we put it here or in London? And my own preference is that it
should be kept locally. But the trouble is that people are more likely
to donate something to the Women's Library than they are to the
local library here.*

In addition, "the subject area is so big, and because a lot of women's activities happens on a regional or even quite a local level" it may be difficult to see how a national network of women's libraries in the British Isles would operate. Nationally relevant material could be shared across a network of women's libraries.

But one potential problem with resource collaboration is the diversity in the libraries' aims and roles. As one staff member said:

*[W]e're not collaborating on a collection development level with the
other women's libraries because none of them [have] quite the same
collection scope as us, as far as I'm aware.*

But the reverse could easily be argued: *because* their collection scope is different, there is considerable potential for greater networking and combining of resources. As many of the women's libraries are small, poorly financed and with limited human resources, working together could provide a practical solution to some common problems e.g. inter-library loans.

Identities and era of origin can also influence the type of and intensity of networking. Thus, the more middle-class, academic, equality-driven Women's Library has long established networks within certain women's circles, especially as it used to be attached to the Fawcett Society. Thus it is likely to attract, and be sought by, similarly-minded organisations who wish to develop links with it, and perhaps deposit their archives there e.g. the Women's Institute or the Townwomen's Guild. In contrast, the Feminist Library was directly connected to the second wave of feminism, and has long established connections with key women involved with creating much of the literary and campaigning output of this era. Organisations such as Women in Libraries (who retained a separatist stance as a group and did not join

the Library Association) deposited their archives at the Feminist Library, as the library's identity and other collections reflected their own identity.

One woman interviewed in Wales raised the idea of having an umbrella body that would facilitate the sharing of information and networking across Wales among a range of women's groups (see quote in Chapter 4, section 4.10). A virtual directory or database might be sufficient for this umbrella role, in order for individuals or groups to look up a particular resource. However, whilst this kind of facility may improve networking, it would still need funding and resourcing.

Another angle that could be investigated is the active use of mailing lists within the library sector. There are many hundreds such groups, particularly hosted by JISC (Joint Information Systems Committee), for all the different sectors, and typical postings are for examples of best practice, answering queries, evidence from trials etc. A similar approach could be used among the women's libraries and could help foster a greater sense of shared communities.

Networking could be seen as the link between the archive-research model and the social-contemporary needs model of women's libraries in that it facilitates cross-domain connections and can possibly overcome the division between the two models. One of the committee members of AMC/WAW highlighted the difficulties of achieving a balance between having a social/community element, and an academic approach. She pointed out that to win certain funding, reaching out to the community and undertaking projects with social benefits were required, but, to gain recognition in the archive world in Wales and to win other funding, a more academic approach was needed.

I mean that is always a sort of contradiction, between academic and community. [...] ...we need the academic side as well, as that gives it credibility.

This highlights the dichotomy discovered within the existing women's libraries and archives, their difficulties with their names, and the cross-over between providing a social role and an academic role.

In summary, on the surface there are elements of networking but the desire by each institution to create the definitive collection of women's resources may interfere with more constructive networking. The creation of Genesis, the online database mapping women's collections in the UK is a positive step towards greater networking and collaboration. Whilst it is not intended to facilitate actual sharing of resources, it raises the profile of all the constituent partners and may create a definite network for future collaboration. Whether it will provide a space for discussing common issues such as collection development policies, preservation, user figures etc, is an issue for future examination and further research.

5.4.3 Relationships

Power and influence is possibly the most important factor when considering the current relationships between the various women's libraries in the British Isles. It was acknowledged in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.10.1), that during the 1970s and 1980s, the women's libraries generally experienced similar difficulties: shoestring budgets, volunteer staff, and crowded unsuitable conditions. Although the Fawcett Library became attached to a University in 1977, it did not develop a high profile until the mid-to-late 1990s when it was campaigning and fundraising for its (successful) Heritage Lottery Fund bid. The awarding of £4.2 million, along with various other financial contributions and support, radically altered the dynamics between the various libraries. The Women's Library re-positioned itself as the National Library of Women, during and after the bid, until persuaded from various quarters that this name was not acceptable in a country of separate nations. Despite adopting a replacement name, it has essentially become *the* Women's Library. Ilett argues that this has led to Glasgow Women's Library temporarily shelving its plans to become a national Scottish institution (Ilett, 2003, p. 330). It could also affect any developments in Wales.

Combined with this is the closure of the Feminist Library, and (at the time of writing) the uncertain future for its collection. Whilst the Women's Library has the greatest capacity to acquire the collection, it appears reluctant to do so, citing a number of different problems.

AT: ... would this library be able to take things or, is a lot of it duplicate anyway?

FF: Well I suppose a certain amount of it might be duplicate material. The er, we're also organised on quite different principles, for example, we admit anyone into this library. And the Feminist Library only admits women. And some of their, I believe some of their archives have got restrictive clauses, so they can only be viewed by women. And they're run as a co-operative, and clearly we aren't! So there are all kinds of issues of taking on a big library, which is run very differently, and the way that we operate here might not be acceptable to the Feminist Library. And then of course there is a question of quite a lot of material I would expect would be duplicated, and what happens to that itself. It's a huge undertaking,...

Whilst some of the smaller libraries have informally offered to take the collection, given their already over-stretched resources, would this be practical or possible? Relationships appear to be rather strained which is disappointing given the relatively small number of related organisations in the British Isles.

5.4.4 Marketing

Given the low profile of many of the women's libraries, it is perhaps inevitable to find that their marketing is often low-key or aimed only at local groups. Few are able to afford to conduct large marketing campaigns that would attract visitors from around the country, yet their collections often have national appeal. The organisations that operate membership or 'Friends of –' schemes may be able to conduct some marketing directed towards these members, but this is inevitably 'preaching to the converted.' As was explored in Chapter 4, few of the organisations have effective up-to-date websites, which are vital marketing tools.

AT: And so how have they [the users] found out about you?

DD: There's a range of things. I mean quite a lot of it is word of mouth, or just knowing us... when we started up. We go out to a lot of voluntary sector events and activities, promote ourselves, ... [we] have our posters and leaflets in the obvious resource places that are to do with the voluntary sector.

The organisation that has the most widespread and high profile marketing campaign is the Women's Library. It maintains email and postal databases of interested people and sends out information in these formats on a regular basis. Their public profile

has been dramatically improved with the winning of the HLF award, and no other women's library can emulate their marketing strength.

Staff at Women in Jazz felt that whilst their profile in Wales was very low, they had a substantial international image and reputation.

But we seem to have a huge reputation in America, and Wales is only just, maybe, wondering, well, what's going on down there?

This may be because jazz has particular significance to America where it emerged out of a combination of black and Creole music, predominantly in New Orleans, Louisiana, and has its roots in the plantation songs of black slaves. Thus, whilst the Women in Jazz archive is able to link up with the national and international jazz network, there is no specific network for women's libraries to join. They may fall between both the library network and the women's-interest network, and given their relative disengagement from librarianship, and the lack of attention to them in the library and women's studies literature, it is possible to understand their low profiles. Marketing could help raise their local and national profiles, but as has been established, the women's libraries frequently lack the human and financial resources to undertake a comprehensive marketing campaign, or to deal with subsequent increased demand upon services.

5.5 Space

Virginia Woolf argued that men had much greater access to education, resources and private space. In order for a woman to have adequate personal space and time to write she would need to have a 'room of one's own' where she would not be disturbed by noise or family members (Woolf, 1928). Women's libraries provide that space, which, despite being a public space, may offer women the resources and facilities to write, learn, or personally develop. The physical existence of women's libraries as well as their collections and resources is an important consideration. This is because:

the spaces in which social practices occur affect the nature of those practices But the spaces themselves in turn are constructed and given meaning through the social practices that define men and women as different and unequal. (McDowell & Sharpe, 1997, p. 3)

Thus, the library space has an impact on behaviour and practices of users.

Whilst women sometimes were provided with 'women's sections' in some public libraries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Baggs, 2000), the creation of separate women-only spaces was particularly important during the various waves of feminism in the last 100 years. For example, in the 1930s the former incarnation of the Women's Library, the Library of the London and National Society for Women's Service, was once housed in a multipurpose women's centre that comprised café, theatre, lecture theatre, library etc. (Ilett, 2003, p. 240). Within the co-operative movement there was a separate Women's Co-operative Guild, founded in 1883. Bailey notes that although there was a National Co-operative Men's Guild established in 1911

there were no barriers to break down similar to those facing women [and] ... therefore there is not the same impulse towards separate organisation. (Bailey, 1955, p. 125)

This necessity to break down barriers was felt particularly in the 1970s when the creation of women's spaces was connected to the ideology of radical feminism and separatism (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, pp. 147-151). Women who believed in separation from the mainstream agenda felt that it was extremely important to create women-only spaces that would enable women to become empowered and enable personal development and reflection within supportive, friendly, welcoming and accessible environments.

The atmosphere and environment of such women-only spaces is therefore an important issue. This can be shown in the following quote about a recently closed women's bookshop in London (which on closure was bought as a going concern by Foyles bookshop and now occupies the top floor of this mainstream bookshop)

But Silver Moon was so much more than a bookshop. We were an advice centre on everything from women's holidays to rape crisis centres; we ran writing courses; we were a meeting place for lesbians and feminists. (Cholmeley, 2004, p. 23)

Women's spaces therefore, take on roles beyond the description of their expected duties. Women's libraries could thus be expected to fulfil a number of different roles for women, and the space would need to be appropriate for these uses.

Within the fields of feminist geography and architecture it is acknowledged that much of the built environment is male-orientated (Matrix, 1984). How then, do women-only spaces overcome this? In section 4.11 in Chapter 4, the design and feel of the physical environment of the libraries was discussed. The pictures revealed very different styles, from new, modern and in-keeping with typical images of libraries, to rooms with comfy sofas, log fires, and cramped bookshelves. Discussions during and after the interviews with staff at the women's libraries also revealed that not only is the design of women's space important, but it is a very personal issue. Different people react differently to different interiors and exteriors.

Ilett links her own (negative) reaction towards the environment of the Women's Library to its identity as an academic institution and also as an organisation that arose out of white, middle-class, equality-orientated first-wave feminism (Ilett, 2003, pp. 240-245). She found the atmosphere to be unwelcoming and intimidating, with the reception area acting as a gatekeeper to the collections and exhibitions (Ilett, 2003, p. 243). Although I too found there to be a degree of formality and severity with regards to the atmosphere and design of the Women's Library, as has become clear throughout the analysis, the Women's Library has a longer history of links to formal institutions (e.g. a university) and has had fewer links to grassroots feminism. The newly designed building is therefore in-keeping with the library's history and nature, and reflects to some extent the prestige associated with winning a substantial HLF award. Despite this, perhaps the negative reactions towards the new building reflect a disappointment that environmental conditions often associated with feminist spaces such as being friendly, close-knit, welcoming and approachable have not been obviously incorporated. Interestingly, when the Women's Library was housed in a basement, users complained about the cramped and difficult conditions (Blagden, 1985, p. 11).

To some extent, the spatial constructions of the various women's libraries visited fall, again, into the two dominant models of women's libraries: academic and research orientated libraries, with designs similar to traditional libraries, and community resource centres designed to be non-intimidating to those unfamiliar

with libraries. This leads to the wider question as to what design Glasgow Women's Library will create when they re-locate the library into a newly refurbished city centre library in Glasgow (the Mitchell Library, see Glasgow Women's Library, 2005). This could be of relevance to Wales, if it is found that the establishment of a women's library is appropriate.

The contrast between the Women's Library and the other women's libraries buildings is stark. They, without exception, exist in small, cramped conditions, and may be slightly inaccessible or unwelcoming e.g. down a dark alleyway (Glasgow), or in a run-down building with male security guards (now-closed Feminist Library). Their interiors may be friendly, welcoming and homely (e.g. sofas, a wood-burning stove and free tea and coffee in Glasgow Women's Library) and thus in-keeping with their identities as women-only spaces, but the conditions may not be the most appropriate for the material, especially delicate or sensitive archive material.

The reaction to physical space is a personal one and although the Women's Library building may not meet some people's expectations of a women's space, it has to combine the roles of being a university library, a library open to the public (which is unusual for most university libraries), and a women's resource that is also open to men. The built environment must therefore reflect all these identities, whilst also being appropriate for the housing of precious archives and resources.

These spatial tensions are further evidence of the conflict between being a library first and foremost, for research and study, and being a women's space, a resource centre for women to come and use, whatever their information needs. Some women may be put off from visiting a women's library due to the very nature of these institutions – not only because of their library status, but also because of their more unusual women-only environment.

*... the concept of a library is terrifying for some women. And the concept of women's space is terrifying for some women as well ...
[her emphasis]*

Further, anecdotal evidence (low usage figures of the women's libraries and the lack of other users in the libraries whilst the visits were taking place) would suggest that

women's spaces are currently not greatly in demand. At variance to this is the belief held by all the staff interviewed in the women's libraries that there was a need for women's spaces:

I think that women don't even know that they want it [a women-only space], but then when they come they really enjoy the space and they really appreciate how safe they feel and how supportive it is, ... a lot of women aren't aware of even, they're still coming in and going 'is that not sexist?' and it's just like, there is a ... feeling [of] 'why do we need our own space?', 'why is that important?', but it's just a matter of coming in, and then they realise.

I still think physical space is important. ... a women's space, is a really important statement, and again politically, it's important, practically it's important, and what you signal by having that space is important as well for women, because there are so few women's spaces.

Thus one of the problems for raising user numbers is how to overcome the vicious circle whereby the potential benefits of women-only environments are often only realised when a woman has experienced a women-only space and overcome any barriers or prejudices she may have had about such spaces.

5.6 Engagement with feminism

Ilett found that women's health centres and the library profession as a whole were not deeply engaged with feminism, despite the high percentage of women in librarianship (Ilett, 2002; Ilett, 2003). The same is true of women's archives and libraries. And the reverse is also applicable, in that women's studies and feminism does not appear to engage with the women's libraries. Many monographs in the diverse field of women's studies, or women and ICT, or women's history fail to mention women's libraries, despite these organisations being crucial in terms of research material. Frequently the terms 'women's library', 'library', 'information' or 'women's archives' do not appear in the indexes of such books (e.g. Beddoe, 1993; Pugh, 2000; Rowbotham, 1999), although authors of some monographs do acknowledge the staff of some of the women's libraries, principally the Fawcett Library (e.g. Barrow, 1981, p. ix; Pugh, 2000, p. v; Rowbotham, 1999, p. xiii).

As has become apparent during the preceding discussion, women's libraries, for various reasons, appear to operate without close engagement with feminism. Only one library created their own feminist classification scheme (which Ilett regards as a key indicator as to the level of feminist engagement, Ilett, 2003). The Women's Library has various projects that reveal its developing links with feminist and women's networks (e.g. Genesis) yet the director acknowledged in her interview that the campaigning element of the previous Fawcett Library had diminished.

This is perhaps evidence of the wider shift within the women's movement from active grassroots engagement with feminist concerns, to a more theoretical or mainstream approach. As was discussed in relation to women's studies courses (see section 2.3.9.1 in Chapter 2), this movement from practice into theory has not been without critique and debate (Kemp & Squires, 1997, pp. 13-16). This may also suggest that women's libraries that remain engaged with local communities and campaigning (e.g. Glasgow Women's Library or Swansea Women's Centre) may find it harder to be seen as relevant, by funders, women, and society as a whole. Whilst the closure of the Feminist Library would be an example of this, the continued success and development over time of Glasgow Women's Library, including their imminent move into rooms within a city centre reference library, defy this generalisation.

It must also be noted, that although the various women's libraries do not always appear to be closely engaged with feminism, feminism does not always appear to recognise them. The lack of discussion about the existence, value and theory of women's libraries from within feminist studies is difficult to explain or understand.

5.7 *Current roles and models*

I think there is a difference between archives and libraries.

This quote by one interviewee captures the essence of the findings in terms of the conflict between women's libraries and women's archives. However, the debate

goes further than a difference between libraries and archives because there is also a difference in what it is to be a library, as opposed to being a space for women.

In Chapter 4, a dual model concept arose when discussing the origins and the aims of the various women's libraries and women's archive organisations. The dichotomy appears to be focused around those that provide an academic research role, and those that serve contemporary and social needs. However, it is clouded by the use of the word 'library' when the institution is perhaps more closely aligned to an archive, or perhaps when it is more similar to a community resource centre. If one considers the mapping and distributed approaches adopted by Ireland and AMC/WAW respectively, the model divides into three different concepts.

Throughout the findings in Chapter 4, and the analysis here, the evidence frequently returns to the central dilemma of the role or model that the organisation emulates i.e. its identity. The division in roles is interesting and one of the key questions it poses is: is it possible, or desirable, to combine the role of being a reference (and/or lending) collection, a resource for academics and researchers, with that of addressing social needs, direct community involvement and offering support services to local women? In addition, is it possible or practical to delineate between research libraries, archives, and resource centres? Many public libraries hold some collections that could be classed as archives; they also have material that is useful for researchers, and, they often meet local community and contemporary information needs through local information services. Given this cross-over within public libraries, is it unfair to expect women's libraries to fall neatly into distinct categories? Whilst the quote at the beginning of this section implies that it is possible to delineate, there are too many exceptions blurring the evidence, even if it would be easier for the libraries themselves to focus on one role or the other.

Evidence from Glasgow suggests that even in the years leading up to the formation of Glasgow Women's Library, personnel were aware of the differences between a community space and a formal library.

As part of Women's House's evolution we had visited the Women Artists' Slide Library in London where information on the

Californian and English womanhouse models were available. It was sensational to see such a volume of stuff on women artists but that model wasn't particularly appropriate to Glasgow, being solely academic and research-centred. We had seen a huge traffic of women who wouldn't normally use libraries come into our original Women in Profile premises. We wanted to combine those two elements, of collecting relevant information mainly made up of things that women might donate themselves, but also making it as accessible as possible. (Women still in profile, n. d., n. p.)

The current aims of Glasgow Women's Library confirms their continued commitment to both academic and social aspects.

In Wales, as has been discussed in section 4.2.1 in Chapter 4, early ambitions of AMC/WAW were for a women's building, which would combine both the research and the social role.

DD: ... We wanted our own library,

EE: A building,

AT: Bearing in mind what you'd seen elsewhere,

EE/DD: Yeah.

EE: I don't know how we thought we were going to fund it, but we had these ideas that somehow we would, I think,

DD: Yes, you had very charming ideas, and we all wanted it. And I think there were social reasons as well as historical record reasons lying behind this. We thought, our own archive, library, and [X] always said the key thing was the café! So it would have been, that would have been delightful, but, to have an archive you have to have money, you know, to ensure its continuance,

EE: Yes, that's it.

Practicalities have forced a scaling down of this vision. With this came a realisation by committee members that the two roles, whilst possible to combine, might not be achieved concurrently.

AA: I think the social and community aspect of it is extremely important, but I think for, for continuity, we need the academic side as well, as that gives it credibility. That is the hard base of it, whereas, if you see what I mean by hard and soft, and I think,

BB: Oh we need both of them,

AA: if you have academic recognition then you can soften it, and go out in the community as well...

Certainly, AMC/WAW have found that they have had to establish their academic credentials in order to be taken seriously by existing archive and library networks in Wales, and now they are trying to broaden their appeal by bringing in social elements, such as the Roadshows.

Regarding the concept of different models of women's libraries it is possible to see how the role of the social or community libraries, or resource centres has diminished over time.

...that kind of social thing, that can be met by quite a lot of different groups now... Maybe the time has passed for that kind of model.

Indeed, the organisations that have more of a social role have continuous problems with funding and security.

I think sometimes they can certainly get the funding to get going, but then after that, ... how do you sustain the funding? Because these are not places that are very heavily used, you know.

As was discussed in Chapter 4, Glasgow Women's Library has problems with its current name essentially because "...a Women's Centre is really what we do." Resource centres are often connected to local community activism, grassroots origins, and direct campaigning for improved conditions for various groups.

A lot of women's collections, particularly the ones that grew out of the 1970s and 1980s, did start as resource centres. How did you get contraception, how did you get an abortion, what do you do about violence, etc, and the resources kind of grew round that...

The favourable conditions for such resource centres may be passing, or may be being absorbed by Citizen's Advice Bureaux, and possibly public libraries. Certainly, in terms of the socially-orientated Feminist Library in London it would appear that the local council thought their time had passed.

Whilst approaches of women's resource centres may seem to be in direct contrast to archive and library developments, it is possible to see how the more traditional (academic) women's libraries and archives do also have connections to social or community developments. For example, the Feminist Archive (South), a specific collection of material for researchers, private and academic, was set up in order to preserve and document the output of the second wave of feminism, which is credited as being very much a grass-roots movement (Radstone, 1992, p105). Further, the Women's Library was founded in order to help women enter into newly opened up professions, and although this was inevitably of benefit to middle-class women, its aims were socially orientated. It was also founded on the basis of a range of

collections donated primarily from the suffragette and suffragist movements, both of which are excellent examples of women's direct campaigning.

Not only do the academically-orientated women's libraries have social connections, the socially-orientated women's libraries have academic credentials, as can be seen in the range and extensiveness of their collections. Thus, there is overlap between the library/archive model and the socially-orientated model of women's libraries. However, this division, that is still deployed by the women in the various women's libraries, sometimes serves to not only create the notion of each women's library as being quite different or separate, but it also underpins some of the tension between the various women's libraries. For example:

...we have a role as a research library but they have quite a different role don't they? They're more of a community centre, in some ways, so, I think you know, we all have to find our own ways of surviving, as things change around us.

... [the community libraries] provide support for people who need a place, you know, something to be attached to, belong to, and that is very different from running a professional, academic library. It doesn't of course mean that they don't have things in those collections that are of great historical significance, and that's certainly true of the Feminist Library and Glasgow, you know, all those small libraries have, you know, things that are very significant.

so Glasgow still has this, I think, promotes itself as a kind of drop-in community centre, and I do think they're different things, personally, either a kind of, you know, archival resource, or, you're providing a service to people, and you can't, they're very different kinds of things.

And you need it all, ..., you need the white gloves and the brush and all that stuff, you really need that but you also need, like, women's stories, and also everything like fanzines and stuff that women make and care about just to get a broad picture... .

I think that the Feminist Library come from one point of view and the Women's Library are managed, they're librarians, who are paid to run a library, and are part of a university, do you know what I mean, and are, just a bit, well, some of them might go and work for a public library somewhere along the line if they get a pay rise.

The difference between the two types of women's libraries in some ways echoes that of the conflict between academic/theoretical feminism and grassroots feminist activism (Gillis & Munford, 2003). As can be discerned from the above quotes, there is some antagonism between the models, and how they are envisaged. Some people in the academic libraries feel that they offer the better service and those in the community resource centres believe that they provide the best options for women. Both are equally valid. For example, benefits from the social resource centre model include the visible personal development of the clientele. A woman may come to the library for a lifelong learning course and end up trying things she wouldn't have thought of doing before she visited the library³. Academic benefits from the 'social' libraries are obvious in the range of resources they offer to women and the importance of their archives to women's history.

The pattern of a division between the socially- or academically-orientated women's libraries in the UK is mirrored in the Republic of Ireland. During the early 1990s a group of women were keen to establish a women's library and resource centre in Dublin. They were awarded money for a feasibility study of the scheme, and created an exhibition about the project and produced a report (not available to the public). Their vision was for a building that would hold resources for and about women, contain a café, meeting rooms etc. This is similar to the early vision of AMC/WAW. However, another group, the Women's History Association of Ireland were concerned about these plans for a Dublin women's centre and were worried that such a centre would be unsustainable in the long term, putting important documents and material in danger if they were housed in such a centre. The Women's History Association of Ireland therefore created their own proposal, and were awarded money for the mapping of women's archives across Ireland. Whilst this scheme has been successful in raising the awareness of women's history and of archives in

³ An example of this was recounted to myself whilst walking to the train station with a member of staff from Glasgow Women's Library. A woman had come to the library for one particular reason, although she had literacy problems and was not confident at reading or writing. After participating on several literacy courses run by the library (which was not her original aim in coming to the library) she went on to be involved with making a video for the library promoting the value of lifelong learning and the library's services.

general in Ireland it does not include the social aspect of a women's resource centre or library. Whilst some women may feel that there is little need for the social resource centre model, others may feel that creating such spaces for women is very important.

AT: And, do you, think there should be more women's libraries in Britain?

FF: It would be nice to have a women's centre in every, area, town, I think there is a need. I don't know about a library, but definitely a women's centre...

AT: And what sort of facilities would they have?

FF: Erm, just a place where, women can connect with each other, and get help with, whatever, information, to find things out, learning things.

Thus, it appears that there a number of conflicting issues to consider regarding women's libraries and their roles in the British Isles. Should they gear their services specifically to one type of customer and one type of need? Is it actually possible to offer resources that attract both academic researchers and women with contemporary social needs? Has the era of women's spaces and separate resources passed? These questions are considered in relation to Wales in Chapter 6.

5.8 Conflicts and tensions

Throughout the findings and analysis it has become clear that there are various conflicts or tensions that permeate the women's libraries. These conflicts can be summarised as:

- the conflict between the ideal aims and objectives and the reality of what is possible
- the desire to adhere to core principles or values whilst still offering an appropriate service
- the tension between being a *women's* resource or being a library that happens to focus on women, which in turn relates to:
- the tension between being engaged with feminism and/or engaged with the library and archive professions

- the conflict between being an archive, a library or a community resource centre

It is interesting that the newer organisations (e.g. AMC/WAW and the Irish Women's History Project) have overcome some of the potential problems by concentrating solely on one issue. For example, the Irish Women's History Project does not concern itself with providing services for contemporary women, and is solely an archive project. Although it has an engagement with feminism in that it is raising the awareness about the importance of women's archives, it is more closely linked to the professions than to local grass-roots women's organisations.

It is not possible to say how each library should resolve these conflicts, as they manifest themselves in different ways in each library. For the now-closed Feminist Library, the tension and conflicts have been experienced many times in their 25 year history. When they lost previous funding in 1988 they were approached by various academic institutions, but at that point in time they decided that they wanted to keep the collection and collective independent, and they continued, on a reduced and voluntary basis for another 15 years. However, they are now in the same position again, and the collective may decide this time, that to secure the future of the material, depositing it in an academic institution may be the only option. Ironically, one of the institutions that approached them in 1988 was the Polytechnic of North London, which later became London Metropolitan University when it merged with London Guildhall University. London Metropolitan University is the 'owner' of the Women's Library, as the Women's Library was housed by London Guildhall University. So, these two very different women's libraries could have ended up in the same place if decisions in the 1970s and 1980s had been different. Such a merger would have enhanced both collections and created an even larger difference between it and the remaining women's libraries. Whether the Women's Library is able to now absorb the now-closed Feminist Library remains to be seen, especially given the financial and resource costs that would be involved.

5.9 Conclusions

AT: Do you think there is, a sort of future for a place like this?

GG: Definitely. I think there's a lot of women who really, benefit, from being here.

I mean it would be lovely to have a centre with accommodation as well, ... , so you could go and ... use it, ... it was always there, that it was always on view, it was always on show.

AT: Do you think there is a role for women's libraries and women's resource centres?...

HH: Definitely. I think there are a lot of women, who are almost coming back to that. I think there was a phase when women felt it was a sign of weakness, or a sign of something negative to want a women's only space, to access and read women's books. I think certainly in the private sector there's quite a lot of pressure on women and things, and I think...it's important to be there when women need it, ..., if you do the survey in the street I would imagine most people would come out negative [i.e. do they want a women's space?], but go and ask them when they're in the middle of a crisis if something was useful, people's attitudes, and things change quite a lot, and I do think there is a huge need out there. But I think it needs to be better publicised, less cliquey, and somewhere where women, all women, would want to go. But that's very difficult.

The future for women's libraries and archives depends not only upon the demand for such institutions by women, but also upon the ability of the women's libraries to raise their profiles so that more women know that they exist and can see the potential and benefits of using them. And although most of the staff interviewed knew about some of the other women's libraries, few had made visits to the other institutions or knew much about their roles and objectives. This raises a key issue of each library being relatively alone in the field, not part of a wider network of libraries, or women's issues. Although many of their identities point to an engagement with feminism, they are not extensively using women's networks to develop. If there was a more active women's information network across the British Isles it might not only foster positive working relationships between the various women's libraries but it could jointly raise their profiles and possibly usage.

The lack of direct co-operation between the various women's libraries visited could be considered to be surprising, considering that many women's organisations try to foster links and co-operation as part of the ethos of being committed to women's issues. Apart from low-level exchange of newsletters and some support between the smaller ones for each other, there did not appear to be much collective working, perhaps in terms of profile raising or sharing resources. For example, staff at the Feminist Library, in a discussion after the tape was turned off, mentioned the value of having somebody to go through the daily newspapers to collect articles on feminism and women's issues, but, due to lack of resources they had never been able to do this. Glasgow Women's Library provides exactly this type of services to paying customers, and potentially, the database could be shared across women's libraries (if it was computerised instead of being on cards, and if they had sufficient staff to resource it).

But, several of the libraries are quite different from another, with different aims and roles, and the potential for networking or collaboration might be limited.

[T]he only real equivalent to us [the Women's Library] is the Schlesinger library in the States which has the same historic collection base, so we're comparable with that rather than any other women's library in Europe or in this country so it is difficult to make comparisons.

The libraries feel that they are the only ones doing exactly what they do. They feel that they are on their own path and quite different from any others. To some extent this may be true, but it also masks the similarities between the women's libraries which could be developed more to facilitate networking and co-operation.

Another finding from the interviews was the low profile of the libraries. Many appear to serve a local audience, with some regional spread, but in terms of national profiles, few are well-known institutions. Thus, whilst their collections could be considered to be of national importance, their presence is often only known within limited geographic or subject-specific networking circles. Again, this raises the question of the potential for national collections be they in Scotland, Wales or England.

Their low profiles, and in some cases declining usage, may be symptoms of wider problems in society with feminism. The media portray society as post-feminist (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004; World Association for Christian Communication, n. d., n. p.): women's studies courses are fewer in number than gender studies (see Section 2.3.9.1 in Chapter 2; BBC, 2004, n. p.); and 'chick-lit' -where 30-something women are generally obsessed with finding a husband or shopping in order to be happy- is popular in film and book charts (as epitomised by Bridget Jones, McRobbie, 2004, pp.261-262). But, chick-lit itself, whilst not feminist in nature, could also be interpreted as evidence of women seeking out literature for and about women (see also the *Girls' night in* and *Girls' night out* short story collections). Amazon now uses the category of 'Chick Lit' as a sub-heading to search fiction.

Figure 9: Screenshot from Amazon.co.uk showing sub-heading of Chick Lit

Other evidence suggests that women still want and seek out women-only spaces, women's courses and have specific women's information needs. For example, an article in a Glasgow Women's Library magazine describes the call from members at the Northern Older Women's Lesbian Conference for a resource and advice centre in Leeds for services and information to such women (Glasgow Women's Library, 2003b, p. 8). In the same issue of the library's magazine, many courses for women in Scotland on International Women's Day 2003 were over subscribed (Glasgow Women's Library, 2003a, p. 5).

Glasgow Women's Library is the prime example of the library that has kept abreast of societal changes and has adapted as necessary:

I think we've survived, and hopefully grow and develop and expand and hopefully continue to do so, because we've responded to what we see as necessary changes. So the whole, and also tuned into a bit of what's happening in, you know, jargon speak, in local government and central government as well, so I think it's important that we've responded to the lifelong learning needs of women. But the library's also, has always developed according to the state of needs of women, there's no doubt about that.

A further consideration is the finding from the literature (see Chapter 2) that most women use networking, informal sources and groups to access and find information that they need. They tend not to use formal institutions, such as resource centres or libraries. This presents the libraries with a problem, especially those that are run along the community centre model. Do women consider approaching these institutions when they require specific information, support or advice? If the profile of a local women's library is sufficient to have permeated into the awareness of many local women, then the women's libraries as resource centres may still have a role. Given this finding from literature on information needs, it may be that a women's library is likely to have more success in terms of visitors and longevity if it is geared more towards academic resources than social needs, even though some may consider it to be a sad reflection on contemporary society if women's social spaces are no longer needed.

Chapter 6: Potential for a women's library in Wales

6.1 Introduction

Any developments in the library and archive sectors in Wales need to be considered in the light of changes occurring in England, Ireland and Scotland in order to place the potential for a women's library in Wales in a wider context. It is therefore relevant to note the establishment of CyMAL (Museums Archives and Libraries Wales) in April 2004 as a policy division of the National Assembly for Wales with responsibility for the promotion and enhancement of these three sectors in Wales. CyMAL was founded following similar developments in England and Scotland (the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council [ML]) in 2000 in England, and the Scottish Library and Information Council [SLIC] in 1991). CyMAL has grant-giving powers and the ability to facilitate profile-raising campaigns, thus their development programmes could be influential in any decision on a women's library or archive in Wales.

Chapters 4 and 5 presented and analysed the findings of the research into women's libraries. In this chapter the specific situation of Wales will be analysed in terms of the potential for a women's library in Wales. It will consider the various options for Wales and discuss each in terms of practicalities and possibilities, as well as draw in the key issues that have occurred throughout this thesis such as: identities, structures, professional and financial issues.

Having analysed the findings there appear to be three possible options for Wales. These are to:

- Recognise the important role of women's libraries, and to acknowledge the gap in provision of information services for women in Wales, in comparison to the rest of the British Isles, and to seek to remedy this by creating a physical women's library/archive, and being open to the public on a regular basis;

- Acknowledge the existence of the current key players in women's information services in Wales and seek to strengthen their positions and possibly broaden their scope, but not create a physical library or archive;
- Acknowledge that women's information and archives are important areas, but seek to improve the availability of relevant information in public libraries, and the collections of women's archives in local record offices rather than creating or enhancing 'separatist' organisations.

6.2 *Current situation in Wales*

Although there is no women's library or archive in Wales, there are similarities between Wales and England, Ireland and Scotland. In Wales there are currently two main organisations working in the field of women's archives: Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW) and Women in Jazz. Both are relatively new organisations, being founded in 1998 and 1986 respectively.

In terms of their collection scope, AMC/WAW seek to encourage the donation of a wide variety of material from both individual women and women's organisations in Wales, as was outlined in the description of the organisation (see Chapter 3, section 3.10). They do not have a physical building for housing the material as the documents and objects are placed under their name at public local record offices and the National Library of Wales. Whilst they are not working towards creating their own archive *in situ*, they have a number of projects they would like to undertake such as a mapping exercise across Wales which would list any relevant resources and collections pertaining to women. They are an independent body and currently receive no grant funding other than one-off project-specific grants.

Women in Jazz, in contrast, have a highly specialised collection which is currently housed in offices rented from a local council. They were recently awarded a two year grant for a full-time development officer, and the rent and utilities are paid by the local council. The physical conditions for the collection are not ideal because they have a number of specialist items that need particular archival care e.g. gowns

worn by jazz performers, old jazz instruments, score music, books, photographs and records.

A third organisation is also relevant to the discussion. Whilst Swansea Women's Centre does not have the archival strength of the other two organisations, it houses a small resource collection and works towards women's training, development and empowerment in a range of contexts. It is regionally-restricted in focus and impact, but co-ordinates with various women's groups in the Swansea and south Wales region. In terms of its approach it is similar to Glasgow Women's Library, but on a much smaller scale.

In addition to these key archive groups, there are various specialist women's groups in Wales, a selection of which is listed in Appendix 6. At present there is no formal network for all these various groups, although many of them do liaise and contact each other, sharing newsletters, supporting events, etc where their spheres of influence overlap.

6.3 Identities – what model or models exist in Wales?

All three of the relevant women's libraries/archives/resource centres in Wales can be placed within my tri-model categorisation of the women's libraries in the British Isles, that is:

- archive-based research institutions
- socially-orientated community-based resource centres
- virtual archive collections

The AMC/WAW approach is quite similar to that of the Women's History Project in Ireland, but they have not been able to attract funding to conduct a similar mapping of repositories in Wales. Aims of both organisations are similar e.g. not working towards a physical repository for the material, and a desire to increase awareness about women's archives and women's history. Whilst AMC/WAW fit into the model of 'virtual' archives/libraries, they are not as well developed as their counterparts in Ireland.

Indeed, it is possible to see that AMC/WAW could be considered as creating their own model in their distributed approach. By ensuring that material relating to women's lives in Wales is deposited in recognised formal county archives or the National Library of Wales, they are able to ensure that the documents and archives are looked after in a professional manner, catalogued properly and access to them is guaranteed across Wales. In Ireland, the material remains in the original repositories, with potentially varying levels of access and appropriate preservation methods. AMC/WAW are working towards developing a similar approach for museum objects as they have for archive material e.g. for banners, textiles.

Women in Jazz matches the archive/research model, although it has a range of socially-orientated elements such as supporting contemporary female jazz artists. It is also a more highly specialised collection than any of the other archives visited in England or Scotland. It should be noted that there are some other specialist women's libraries in the British Isles, but, as was outlined in Chapter 3, specialist libraries were included in Wales on account of there being no other relevant institutions, whereas in the British Isles there were sufficient other institutions to visit without investigating the more specialist libraries e.g. women's health libraries.

The social or contemporary needs model can be seen in Swansea Women's Centre, although their resource collection does not compare in terms of scope and extensiveness to that of Glasgow Women's Library or the former Feminist Library. Whilst they work with women in the community offering a range of services and training sessions, they have a much smaller archive collection and research base. As with AMC/WAW, they could be considered to be less developed than other similar organisations in the UK that operate within the social-contemporary needs model.

Wales, therefore, has a virtual women's library (to a degree), a specialist women's archive collection, and a regionally-focused resource centre. But, using my tri-model classification developed from the situation in the British Isles we can see that there is a gap in terms of a *general* women's library, which houses its own collection of archives and resources, and provides access to the public and may or may not be

connected to a larger organisation such as a university. Pertinent questions arise from identifying this gap that are crucial to the focus of this investigation. Does this gap matter? Should it be filled? And if so, by what? This issue is the crux of the thesis and is the focus for this chapter's discussion.

In order to consider whether there is potential for a generic 'women's library' it is important to remember that the analysis from the research in the British Isles found few women's libraries that had a wholly 'general' approach. They all specialise to some extent – in their approach, style or collection focus. Consequently, there is no single model that can be directly replicated in Wales. It is also questionable how successful a 'general' women's library could be, given for example, the findings from the women's information needs literature which suggest that women from a variety of different backgrounds do not tend to seek information from formal sources such as libraries (see Chapter 2, section 2.4.6). Furthermore, the future for some of the women's libraries is insecure and unknown. During the period of research the Feminist Library closed, and the Feminist Archive (South) was contemplating a move into a local university. Yet whilst these two institutions face uncertain futures, the Women's Library was able to attract a £4.2million HLF grant and has had a subsequent increase in its profile and usage.

Despite these varying degrees of existence, Wales could be considered to be well-placed to develop its current provision for women's archives and libraries, given that the three key organisations broadly cover the three main types of women's libraries i.e. archive-based, social-contemporary needs, and virtual mapping. The existence of these structures creates the situation whereby there is potential for all three sectors to develop and enhance their provision, although this is inevitably dependent upon economic, social and political conditions. Given the existing structures in Wales it is possible to identify three options for the future. Each option has disadvantages and advantages which call for further exploration.

6.4 Option 1 – Create a physical women’s library and archive

Creating a single physical women’s library or archive to serve all of Wales is not an actively pursued aim of any of the three key women’s information organisations investigated. That it not to say that the idea of a women’s space isn’t appealing – many of those interviewed saw such a building as a ‘dream’, but they were also able to recognise the practical problems of creating such an institution.

[...] if there were a lot of us together, the Women’s Archive, and us, and, you know, perhaps some university women’s resources, if we got together, and plonked ourselves in the middle of Wales somewhere, so everybody’s got easier access to us. [...] Because what we’ve got here needs to be, in public display, something like [...] the Dylan Thomas exhibition where it’s there and it’s up, and it’s permanent and anybody can go in and look round and all the rest of it.

Well, my grand vision would obviously be a building, somewhere on the maritime quarter [...] Now then, if we could be part of that, even if it’s in somebody else’s building, because we, the thing is with this, although we’re eternally grateful to the city for looking after us, we can’t have public access up here, with the stairs. And, you know, everything is on top of us. If there was somebody sitting here researching we can’t do any work...

HH: Yes, an office would be a perfectly feasible thing, if you get the funding for it of course. But, to think of getting a building to hold the archive would be millions, and we’re unlikely to get, or even want, that at the present time.

JJ: I don’t think we do actually. I mean, if, if, now, they’ve been talking for a long time about getting a women’s building in Swansea for example, and I think at one stage that was floated and would we want a space in there. Well actually a space in there would actually be quite handy, but, just, literally an office space.

I still think there should be a women’s, building, or space or whatever. If it starts off as just a database to start with, fair enough, at least it shows where everything is.

These quotes highlight several issues - from resources, public access, joint ventures as well emphasising the notion that women working together in a women’s space is an attractive idea to many women’s organisations. Increased networking and joint profile-raising are outcomes of being located together, and given the significant number of women’s organisations in Wales (see Appendix 6) bringing related organisations together in one building may well be beneficial.

6.4.1 Funding

Despite the desirability of a women's building on theoretical grounds, the prime factor influencing this option is funding. All the other women's libraries struggle continuously with funding issues, and lack of money to pay the rent has resulted in the closure of the Feminist Library in London. Even staff at the Women's Library admit that they are always fundraising and will always rely upon donations, grants and the financial input of the university. Thus, any proposals for a physical women's library in Wales would have to account for considerable revenue income, from a variety of sources.

Many of the existing women's libraries receive some funding from their local city or county councils, so the location of a physical building has ramifications for local government. Whilst some local councils may currently fund women's organisations such as Welsh Women's Aid by providing them with offices or a council-owned building for a refuge, it is unlikely that any local council in Wales would wish to take on the financial responsibility of a women's library building that doesn't have such immediately obvious need (or local relevance) as a women's refuge. In addition to council funding, most of the women's libraries also attract some grant money, and so other organisations would be required for financial contributions towards a women's library in Wales.

In Wales, libraries and archives are funded directly and indirectly by the National Assembly for Wales (NAW), therefore this organisation could be a key donor. For example, in 2005-2006 the National Library of Wales received nearly £11 million in grant-in-aid funding from the NAW (National Assembly for Wales, n. d. -b, n. p.); CyMAL (mentioned previously) receives a budget of £3 million pa. The National Assembly for Wales also financially supports other non-governmental bodies in the information sector such as the Welsh Books Council and the Arts Council of Wales, both of which may have some interest in a new library or archive venture. Whilst grants are an important source of income, they are rarely long-term, and can be

difficult to obtain unless the project addresses specific concerns that each body is keen to address e.g. social inclusion, life-long learning.

As has been acknowledged in both Chapters 4 and 5, applying for funding can be time-consuming and difficult. Furthermore, given the current situation there is no single organisation that would be able to start the process of seeking substantial funding for a nation-wide women's library/centre. Whilst AMC/WAW is national in terms of its outlook, all the Committee members are volunteers, and distributed across Wales. Women in Jazz is a very specific collection and has just won funding for two years to develop its own archives, and Swansea Women's Centre does not have the personnel or the national-outlook to develop an application for an all-Wales women's library.

The financial situation also governs issues such as staffing, stock, computers, utilities, equipment and marketing, thus sufficient funds would be needed to ensure a professional service was provided. Taking all these issues into account, it can be seen that the financial situation is critical when considering the potential for women's library in Wales. Assuming that an appropriate amount of money could be sourced, over a long-term period, other issues would also need careful consideration.

6.4.2 Collections and stock

The collections on which a women's library would be based are highly relevant in any consideration of the potential for a women's library in Wales. As has been seen in the analysis of the findings from outside Wales, the collections of women's libraries vary depending upon the identity (model) and role of the institution. Thus, the Feminist Archive (South) has very time-specific criteria for stock, collecting material that relates to the second wave of feminism which they date to be c.1960-c.2000. The Women's Library, in comparison, has a much broader time-span, but due to its history and origins, the strengths of its archival collections are in suffrage material along with other collections from significant women or societies. There is less emphasis on information about current women's needs e.g. local crèches. This is because the identity of the institution necessarily influences its collection, and

those that are primarily archives for research and preservation tend not to focus on social/contemporary needs. Glasgow Women's Library and the former Feminist Library are examples whereby information (and other) needs of local individual women are more likely to be met, and whilst they may also possess valuable archive collections (especially in the case of the Feminist Library), there is greater emphasis on current information provision - that is, they are more akin to public libraries than archive services.

As a consequence of these issues, if a physical women's library or archive institution was to be established in Wales its identity would need to be considered. If it were to be an archive, then it would need to contain a significant amount of useful material in order to attract customers (researchers), and to attract funding. One staff member at an existing women's library highlighted this issue of collections:

[U]nless you knew there were six major women's, Welsh women's organisations with nowhere to house their collections, I wouldn't start trying to [set up a women's library]...

In order for it to be a comprehensive archive, it would be essential that material was not only donated by existing women's groups and organisations (e.g. Merched y Wawr, Welsh Women's Aid), but that material currently located in existing archives and libraries be re-located into the women's archive. A definitive archive on women in Wales would, for example, possibly need to include copies of the Welsh-language women's magazines from the 1850s and 1880s (some of which are currently housed in the National Library of Wales), as well as the first ever printed book in Welsh written by a woman (*Telyn Egryn*, 1850, by Elin Evans, reprinted by Honno in 1998, the original manuscript of which is in the National Library of Wales), along with papers of significant Welsh women.

For a number of reasons, it is highly unlikely that any institution would be willing to donate or relocate such material¹. For example, the National Library of Wales has

¹ The international case of the Parthenon Marbles (also known as the Elgin marbles) is a pertinent example here. The British Museum acquired these after they were removed from the Acropolis in Greece in 1801 by Lord Elgin, the British Ambassador to Greece. The 176-yard frieze was sculpted in the fifth century but only some of it has survived. Roughly half the remaining pieces are in Greece and half in Britain. Greece has asked for the return of the sculptures so that the sculptures can be reunited in one collection. The British Museum refuses on the grounds that they would not be

the most extensive collection of material about Wales. Whilst they might agree to make microfilm or digital copies of relevant material (a process that would also need funding), they would probably be unwilling to donate material to another library or archive. In addition, material already in libraries and local record office archives in Wales is likely to be held in appropriate conditions. There could be uncertainty as to the professionalism of a new women's library, especially if funding was insecure. This is one reason why AMC/WAW have sought to place material in established institutions in Wales as they know that the material will be kept in appropriate conditions with guaranteed public access.

This latter point is relevant because the Feminist Archive (South) is reliant upon volunteers and is only open one afternoon a week. This does not facilitate in-depth use of the collection, particularly by long-distance researchers. If a physical women's archive were to be established in Wales, it would be most beneficial if opening hours were as extensive as possible. This would inevitably be dependent upon finances and personnel circumstances.

If a physical women's building was to be more aligned with a library rather than an archive, there would be different collection and stock issues. Those that seek (or sought) to serve contemporary women's needs e.g. Glasgow Women's Library, the Women's Resource Centre and the Feminist Library, may wish to operate like a public library and have a lending collection. Glasgow lends its fiction material, but the other two libraries do not lend their material. If the material cannot be borrowed, it may mean some women are not able to use the resources, and this may detract from its use.

The material also needs to be up-to-date if the library is seeking to meet contemporary needs. Thus the Women's Resource Centre tends not to rely upon donations of material as it needs to buy the most recent version of directories for example, to ensure it is not providing inaccurate information. In addition, the

preserved well enough in Greece, and that public access to them is provided at the British Museum. (Thorpe, 2002, n. p.; Swindale, 2002, n. p.)

material needs to cover a wide range of issues e.g. childcare, education, employment, financial, health, hobbies, legal etc. Whilst established women's libraries know who their clientele are, they also admit that there is no typical customer:

So there really isn't a typical library user at all, they're so varied, they come from all walks of life.

So our users are a mixture.

Consequently, the women's library in Wales would need to undertake a large scale user-needs survey to establish what type of material women might wish to use (as well as conducting a survey to find out if there is a need for such an institution at the outset).

Assuming that women would use the library for seeking information on a wide range of issues, creating a relevant, up-to-date, extensive and useful collection of material from nothing would be financially difficult and logistically complex². What resources (i.e. books, journals) would be chosen? On what basis? How long would it take to create a viable library resource that would attract customers? Who would pay for the purchase of the material at the outset? Would there be a book budget? Would the material be for loan or reference only? In addition, if the focus of the institution was as a library, would it seek to acquire any archive collections, or would it be purely for social/contemporary needs? If it acquired archives, would they be able to be adequately looked after? The collections, whether archive or library-orientated would also need to be managed professionally – an issue which is discussed in the following section.

6.4.3 Professional issues

Women's libraries across the British Isles exhibit varying degrees of professionalism. Some, like the Women's History Project have sought from the outset to maintain a professional approach, and their development was in contrast to an alternative proposal for a women's resource centre in Dublin that some felt would not be professional and would endanger precious archives. Professional issues cover

² It may also be relevant to note that many of the other women's libraries in the British Isles arose out of particular social or cultural movements of their time: it may be difficult to replicate similar conditions that would stimulate similar motivation.

matters such as staff qualifications, pay and pay scales, computer catalogues, stock checks, classification schemes, storage conditions, accessibility and adherence to common library or archive standards.

As was discussed in both Chapters 4 and 5, few of the women's libraries or archives employ professionally qualified librarians and archivists. Some have made a concerted effort to employ only those with the relevant qualifications (as with the Women's History Project in Ireland) in order to create a professional image. Some of the other women's libraries however, rely upon volunteer staff and do not require that the women have professional qualifications. Within Wales, some of the women on the AMC/WAW committee have either library or archive backgrounds and/or qualifications, whilst some are academics. Others may fit neither of these categories but are interested in women's history. Likewise, the Women in Jazz archive is run by an enthusiast who, whilst not possessing library or archive qualifications, has had a long personal interest in women's issues and has a Masters qualification in women's studies. In all three institutions visited in Wales, the input of volunteers with the necessary qualifications is often achieved for short-term projects e.g. cataloguing projects. However, some of the women's libraries outside of Wales noted that the lack of staff with the specific professional qualifications was sometimes to the detriment of the resource (see quotes in Section 4.8 of Chapter 4). Consequently, if a women's library or archive were to be established in Wales, it would be important to consider the internal and external impacts of employing (or not employing) professionally qualified staff.

Linked to this issue of qualifications is the matter of pay and pay scales. Some of the women's libraries in the British Isles are run purely by volunteers e.g. Feminist Archive (South), former Feminist Library, whilst others rely on some paid staff and some volunteers e.g. Glasgow Women's Library. The main advantage of not employing paid staff is that money is saved – and the women's libraries frequently have very little money to spend. However, relying upon volunteers can lead to patchy service and there is no compulsion on volunteers to turn up on time, carry out the work satisfactorily etc. Despite this, volunteers at women's libraries tend to be

dedicated to the purpose of the work and frequently commit a significant amount of time and energy towards the organisation. Where workers are paid, the salary may not be commensurate with similar work in traditional libraries or archives:

...we moved from being completely voluntary workers to having, albeit low-paid, part-time workers ..., in 1994 we had three part-time very very low-paid workers.

These issues would need to be considered if a physical library was established in Wales. How many staff would be needed? Would they all be paid? If so, on what scale? Would there be any volunteers working for the library? Would staff be required to have relevant professional qualifications?

One final question to consider regarding staff issues is whether men would be allowed to be members of staff or volunteers. Currently none of the three women's archives/resource centres in Wales employ men, although there are male trustees of Women in Jazz. The decision perhaps rests on the type of institution that would be created, and if it was seeking to identify itself specifically as a separate women's space, for the benefit of women, then it may prefer not to employ men. However, it would need to seek exemption from the Sexual Discrimination Act in order to only appoint women – a position Welsh Women's Aid adopts due to the nature of its work.

In addition to there being few professional qualified librarians and archivists in the women's libraries, there are also few accurate computer catalogues of the stock. The two may be related as a professionally qualified librarian or archivist might appreciate the importance of such a catalogue more than, say, an ex-social worker. For Wales, if there was to be a physical women's library or archive, in order for it to be used extensively and to its maximum potential, a computer catalogue would be essential. Researchers would be more likely to use the resource if they could consult the computer catalogue in advance to ascertain if the relevant material is available. Related to the issue of a computer catalogue is the need for regular stock checks. It is frustrating for researchers to discover that the material they were expecting to find in the library or archive is missing. Some of the women's libraries outside of Wales admitted to not carrying out frequent stock checks. Both a computer catalogue and

regular stock checks would enhance the professional image of the library or archive and would be essential procedures.

In addition to these matters, suitable storage facilities would be needed for the material, particularly if the institution was to be constructed primarily as an archive. Certain items require specific temperatures, light conditions, humidity levels etc, and these factors would need to be taken into account before accepting material, and when designing a physical space or looking for suitable properties. As was noted in Chapter 4, women's archives can include a range of ephemeral material such as banners, badges, posters, etc, all of which are quite unusual items for preservation:

[B]ecause there's, you know, a photography collection, the record collection, the oral history collection that I was trying to build up. You know, there's a lot of formats here, you know? It's not just books.

This suggests the importance of employing qualified personnel who would be trained in the preservation and conservation of a range of material.

As has already been noted, the value of a physical women's library or archive is that it would create a single location for the collating of women's archives and resources. To capitalise on the potential of the resources it should be as accessible as possible in terms of opening hours/days, as well as physical access e.g. access for wheelchairs. Such a library or archive would preferably be open 5 days a week (including Saturday, so perhaps closed one weekday as at the Women's Library), with possible evening opening hours. The table below shows the opening times of the other women's libraries. Public libraries across the British Isles are responding to demands for longer opening hours, including weekends and evenings (see the Public Library Standards for England formulated in 2001 by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and the Welsh Public Library Standards facilitated by CyMAL). It would be unfortunate if a physical women's library had restrictive opening hours that did not facilitate easy access to the resources that it contained.

Library/Archive	Opening hours
Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW)	n/a
Feminist Archive (South)	Wednesday afternoons from 2.00pm to 4.30pm
Feminist Library (in 2003-04)	Formerly: five days a week
Glasgow Women's Library	Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday 1.00-6.00pm Thursday 1.00-9.00pm
Swansea Women's Centre	Mon/Wed/Fri: 10am - 4pm appointments Tue/Thur: 10am - 1pm drop-in
Women in Jazz	By appointment
Women's History Project (Ireland)	n/a
Women's Library	Tuesday to Friday, 9.30am to 5.00pm Thursday until 8.00pm Saturday 10.00am to 4.00pm
Women's Resource Centre	By appointment

Table 4: Opening hours of the women's libraries

In summary, in order for a new women's library or archive to attract researchers, customers, funding and a national profile, the institution needs to adhere to professional library or archive standards such as those promoted by Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and the National Archives Standard for Record Repositories developed in 2004 by The National Archives.

6.4.4 Management & strategy

If a new physical women's library or archive were to be created, its management and structure would be important considerations. As we have seen from the analysis of such institutions outside Wales, there are various options.

Some women's libraries or archives are independent institutions, not attached to other organisations such as a university. However, these independent libraries and archives tend to be those most likely to struggle with funding, and sometimes pay less attention to the professional issues outlined above. The advantages of being independent are that there is direct influence over the direction of the institution, freedom to develop certain services, choice over projects and tasks etc. Consequently, the institutions that have a stronger feminist agenda tend to be

independent. In comparison, being attached to a university or some other educational or cultural body can bring prestige, raise the library/archive's profile, and also provide a degree of backup should the library or archive run into difficulties but the governing body may also intervene in matters. In essence, the decision is whether to integrate or to maintain a separatist agenda, which is a key debate at the heart of feminism. One staff member at an existing women's library warned that being independent would be a very difficult position.

In Wales there are several higher education institutions, which, along with the National Library of Wales, represent institutions that could be the 'parent' body for a women's library or archive in Wales. For example, University of Wales Swansea has recently developed an MA in Gender and Culture (2004 – offered on both a part-time and full-time basis) and the University of Wales Bangor has offered an MA in Women's Studies (via the Department for Lifelong Learning, offered on a part-time basis) since 1994. Thus they may be receptive towards providing funding and space for a women's library and archive. However, universities have limited budgets and may wish to impose conditions or constraints on any newly established women's library or archive. For example, in the 1970s the Fawcett Library was seeking to join a university and some offers to house it would have led to the fragmentation of the collections, discarding of some material, or the relocation out of London, none of which were attractive options to the managers of the Fawcett Library at that time. At the time of writing, the Feminist Archive (South) is in consultation with a university in the local area as the Archive's management team feel that it is no longer possible to support the Archive and that a university would offer the optimum long-term security for the material. It is also pertinent to note that the future of the now-closed Feminist Library in London is uncertain, and whether any other women's libraries or universities offer to take the collection remains to be seen.

Whilst the National Library of Wales has many collections that do relate to women, it does not draw attention to these as a separate collection. It houses some of the material donated via the AMC/WAW scheme such as the papers of the writer Menna Gallie. In terms of providing a structure for a national women's library or archive

the National Library of Wales could be considered to be ideally placed, although it may not have the necessary funding to create such an institution unless it received more money from the National Assembly for Wales. It would also be unlikely to create a physically separate collection of material, thus the notion of the library or archive being a women's space and all the material being held in a few rooms would be unlikely. The Women's Library is the only women's library that is currently attached to a university, although it has its own building and staff. This is due to its historical development and it is interesting to note that its successful HLF grant was for a new purpose-built building, rather than for it (as the Fawcett Library) to be integrated into the existing university library. The latter would probably not have been possible in terms of space, and would also not have brought as much prestige and media attention to the new Women's Library.

The profile of any new women's library or archive is thus an important concern. As was explored in Chapters 4 and 5, most of the women's libraries tend to be fairly low-key, perhaps with a local profile, with little national or wider awareness of their significance. This is true in terms of their profile within library and women's studies circles, partly reflected in the lack of literature about, and research on, these institutions. Since the Women's Library re-opened in a new building after winning the HLF award, their profile has been raised considerably, and they have featured in many newspaper articles, or hosted programmes for Radio 4 and their exhibitions and conferences are listed in the culture sections of national newspapers (e.g. the *Guardian* and the *Independent*). However, this increased awareness does not appear to have trickled-down to the other women's libraries (Ilett, 2003, p. 282) (and 4.10.1 in Chapter 4).

The importance of having a national profile is that it may attract more users to the institution, will help raise its prestige and thus its ability to attract grant funding, and it may also increase awareness of the issues of concern to women's libraries and archives. A positive feedback mechanism may then lead to the library receiving more archive donations and there could be more research on the documents leading to more published research on women's history and experiences. However, this

positive feedback mechanism is hard to create, particularly if there are few resources for marketing or profile raising.

6.4.5 *Engagement with librarianship and feminism*

A successful physical women's library needs to engage with the library and archive professions, and with women's issues. This is partly due to the support that may be provided by being part of a network e.g. advice on cataloguing, as well as being able to draw on the wider network in order to raise the profile and increase usage of the institution. An institution that remains outside of formal networks or professions may be isolated in its work and may not be as successful as one that engages with relevant networks.

Engagement with librarianship does not appear always to be central to some of the women's libraries and archives. This was seen in their varying levels of networking and contact with library networks, varying degrees of following standard library practices and the lack of emphasis on recruiting qualified staff. In Wales, it was noted that AMC/WAW had felt that there was an initial negative reaction towards them; as more local record offices join their scheme, the archive and history network should become more convinced of their professionalism and commitment to archives and history. The Women in Jazz archive has links with other jazz archives in Britain, but as a specialist resource, it is perhaps excluded from other formal networks. It maintains links with the jazz and archive professions by appointing established professionals to its board of trustees, thus ensuring that its processes and development are in line with these sectors as a whole. This position is harder to maintain for Swansea Women's Centre. As a women's resource centre there are no immediately obvious professional networks for it to link to. Its library is currently small in scale, and although the centre provides some training, it is not an educational institution. Its networks therefore come from having a greater degree of engagement with feminism and women's issues.

Furthermore, issues such as whether men would be allowed into a women's library/archive, would need to be clarified. A women's library arising out of the

Swansea/Glasgow model would probably restrict men's access to the building, whereas if a library developed around the other two archive organisations, there may well be equal access for men and women as these organisations have slightly less engagement with separatist feminist beliefs and place more attention on increasing the awareness of, and access to, women's archives.

6.4.6 Cultural and geographic issues

If a physical building for a women's library or archive was established in Wales, there are a range of cultural and geographic issues to consider. With a physical library the location is of utmost importance. It needs to be accessible to a large number of people, either by being in a densely populated area, or, by being close to good transport links (including public transport). During the 1970s, when the Fawcett Library was seeking a new supporter, the members rejected an offer from the University of East Anglia because they wished the library to remain in London (Pankhurst, 1987, p. 230).

In Wales, whilst the capital city Cardiff, could claim the right to house the collection, recent developments in local government show that there is a desire for institutions to be more equally distributed across Wales to avoid an over-concentration of resources, employment and people in a few key urban areas³. This can also be seen in the library sector whereby the National Library for Wales was established (in 1911) in Aberystwyth rather than in Cardiff. In fact, Cardiff has only been the capital of Wales since 1955 and other towns in Wales claim that they once were the capital (e.g. Machynlleth in mid Wales). Although the majority of the population of Wales live in south Wales - the counties of Bridgend, Cardiff, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea and the Vale of Glamorgan have 31.5% of the population of Wales (Welsh Office, n. d., n. p.) - there was a feeling among the women interviewed that a new library would need to be sensitive to the north-south divide in Wales and as a consequence, would perhaps not be located in South Wales.

³ Under the NAW's Location Strategy 2002-2007 approximately 300 jobs will be moved out of Cardiff to Aberystwyth and Llandudno Junction

If you do something in the South, it's very difficult for people from the North to come down, and vice versa. ... [T]here's this sort of barrier across the middle of Wales, and it's difficult to cross.

But on the other hand of course, you need to be peripatetic in Wales, and we might need to have, [one office] ... based in North Wales and Aberystwyth, and one based in the South. And, you know, in that case, the organisation becomes a bit more difficult. This is always the case with Welsh organisations. You have to get round that, geography.

[I]f there were a lot of us together, the Women's Archive, and us, and, you know, perhaps some university women's resources if we got together, and plonked ourselves in the middle of Wales somewhere, so everybody's got easier access to us. Because if it was in Swansea or Cardiff we'd all be bitching because it's in Cardiff and not here, or it's in Swansea and not in Cardiff which is the capital. So it should be up in Aberystwyth.

Furthermore, transport links within Wales are not conducive to extensive travelling (especially by public transport), and wherever a physical library for women in Wales was located, it would lead to differing levels of access. Outside of Wales, the location of physical libraries or archives appears to be rather accidental, dependent upon historical circumstance. Thus, Glasgow Women's Library grew out of local arts initiatives, and it remains in Glasgow despite developing a more national Scottish outlook.

Connected to the issue of location within Wales is the position and status of the Welsh language. In certain areas of Wales the Welsh language is used in daily business and social life e.g. Aberystwyth, Bangor, Machynlleth, whereas in other towns and areas it is less used and has less significance e.g. the Welsh valleys, Monmouthshire. Thus, if a physical library were to be established, and the Welsh language was given equal weighting i.e. for signage, language of work, etc, then it may be more likely that this could be achieved, or would be seen as appropriate, in an area where the Welsh language was in daily use. As a national (i.e. for all-Wales) organisation, a women's library would perhaps wish to follow the precedent set by other national institutions e.g. the National Library of Wales, the National Assembly for Wales, whereby the Welsh language is given equal weighting and all

correspondence, paperwork etc is available in both languages, irrespective of location.

However, the language issue influences more than just the location and daily running of the library. It also has a bearing on what type of material is collected, the prominence of Welsh language material in the archives, provision of services in both languages etc. If the organisation was to be styled more as a public library (as opposed to a research-based archive), would contemporary material be provided in both languages? This raises the question of how much information about or by women is actually available in Welsh. Whilst Honno Welsh Women's Press publishes in both languages, its commitment to the Welsh language in terms of publishing output has decreased since 1994 when it won Arts Council of Wales funding and has to publish a certain number of English-language titles each year. Over time, it has increasingly become regarded as an English-medium publisher, and few Welsh manuscripts are received (Tyler, 1999, p. 11). The other main publisher of books on women in Wales is the University of Wales Press; many of their academic books are only available in English e.g. *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939* edited by Angela V. John, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* by Deirdre Beddoe, and *Women and Work: Twenty-five Years of Gender Equality in Wales* by Teresa Rees. Thus, whilst there could be a commitment to the Welsh language in appointing Welsh-speaking staff, creating marketing material in both languages etc, it may not be possible to create a contemporary library that houses an equal amount of material in both English and Welsh.

6.4.7 Summary of Option 1

In view of the range of issues that need to be considered before a women's library for Wales could be created (e.g. geography, resources, collections, funding, management, model type and structures, language and professional considerations) it is perhaps practical to concur with a key stake-holder in this field (AMC/WAW) which does not see the development of a physical women's library as a practical or possible aim. Whilst referred to as a 'dream' or an ideal, the practicalities are

perhaps too great a barrier. Whilst Glasgow Women's Library has been successful in its 15 years of existence, this has taken much unpaid and under-paid work, commitment and dedication. The closure of the Feminist Library in London also serves as a potential reminder as to what can happen with a change in financial fortunes.

6.5 Option 2 – strengthen existing key players rather than creating a physical library or archive

In contrast to creating a new women's library or archive centre in a physical building somewhere in Wales, another viable option would be to enhance the positions and potential of existing relevant organisations.

6.5.1 Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW)

For AMC/WAW, their current aims are not directed towards campaigning for a building, although they would welcome funding for office space, as highlighted in quote three in Section 6.4 above. The committee members of AMC/WAW see office space (and funding for a member of staff) as enabling them to more adequately meet their aims of raising awareness of women's history and increasing the quantity and range of material donated under their scheme. A paid member of staff could undertake a range of marketing activities, increase membership figures, raise the profile of the scheme among local record offices as well as contact individuals or organisations that may have relevant material for deposit or donation.

This latter point is of key concern as the committee members of AMC/WAW would very much like to conduct a mapping exercise of resources in Wales.

Once we'd decided that we were going to be depositing material in existing archives, you know, really the focus shifted then to what else we would be doing. And a project very like the Irish project was really something we had in mind, wasn't it?

We wanted in a way, to sort of, catalogue what resources first of all existed in Wales and beyond Wales. In other words, we wanted to do what Maria Luddy and the Irish women had done. But we were, elbowed out of that, we weren't welcomed with open arms by the archive community in general, were we?

The second quote alludes to the development of Archives Network Wales (ANW), which has mapped archive collections across Wales and created a web-based resource that facilitates searching the collections held by record offices, universities, museums and libraries in Wales (<http://www.archivesnetworkwales.info>). As a consequence of the ANW project AMC/WAW committee members felt that their proposals had been rejected, perhaps as they were perceived to be less well established or less professional than ANW, and they have not received funding to conduct a mapping project of Wales. ANW is developing national standards for descriptions to facilitate online cross-searching of databases. The AMC/WAW committee is developing its own database of donated material to ensure that their database is compatible with ANW so that the two can be fully integrated. This would ensure that AMC/WAW material could be found using a search of the ANW database.

Because the ANW project did not have a specific objective to look for material that relates to women in Wales, it is not as extensive as the Women's History Project Ireland. It has also not had sufficient funding to employ archivists to visit all repositories and known private collections in Wales to specifically collate data on archives and resource materials. For these reasons AMC/WAW would still like to conduct a mapping exercise contacting a wider range of repositories and to list material that may not have been formally documented. Creating this 'virtual' archive of women's resources would not endanger the material itself, and could aid research into women's history in Wales. However, to undertake work on the scale of the project in Ireland would still require substantial funding, most likely from the government.

In addition, the Irish project is also hosted by the Irish Manuscripts Commission, thus providing long-term stability and a link with the profession. AMC/WAW would therefore need to consider who might be a likely professional organisation that could contribute towards the maintaining the project. Despite these issues, this option is perhaps more feasible than the option of creating a physical building for an archive.

A recent development in Wales however, may have again superseded the ambitions of AMC/WAW. CatalogCymru: Archives and Records Council Wales has been awarded a grant by CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales to undertake an audit of un-catalogued archival collections in Wales and to carry out research into cataloguing, indexing and appraisal practices in Wales. The project commenced on 1 January 2006. Perhaps, the best way forward for AMC/WAW is to ensure that some of their concerns e.g. noting where material pertains to women, are incorporated by CatalogCymru.

As well as the two cataloguing projects in Wales, there are other virtual collections which similar objectives e.g. Genesis and Collections Wales. Genesis was discussed in Chapter 4 and focuses on women's archives and material in the United Kingdom. Collections Wales was the result of a collaborative project between Wales Higher Education Libraries Forum (WHELF) and Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) from 2000-2002. Initially an independent project, it has now been incorporated into Wales on the Web. Wales on the Web is a collection of validated websites, and is defined as 'the gateway to internet resources relating to Wales' (Wales on the Web, 2005, n. d.). It is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and based at the National Library of Wales. Entering the search term 'women' brings up 81 results (as of August 9th 2005) –varying from details of various women's organisations in Wales to a female basketball team in the Rhondda. There is a link to AMC/WAW. As a result of the overlap of these various online databases, AMC/WAW may find it difficult to justify the need for a virtual archive of women's material in Wales and an extensive mapping project if similar projects already exist, although none of the existing projects specifically focus on women and women's archives.

As a consequence of realising that a physical building for an archive was not practical or possible, AMC/WAW have turned their attention to other projects that match their core aims of raising the profile of women's history in Wales, such as seeking to rescue relevant material.

Because we felt, because we were informed that the Welsh archives

operating together, under this Archive Network Wales, wanted to look at a big cataloguing project really, what is where, we swapped the emphasis for our project ... we then concentrated on doing a rescue project, didn't we? Which was a combination of, well, it was primarily 'what is out there?' and it's get back to our root idea of, stopping stuff, disappearing in the future. And there is an urgent need. To rescue it.

... our new, our system of what we rescue being put in repositories. So that really was a very good solution. And a very innovative one really.

In order to accomplish their aims of rescuing relevant material, AMC/WAW have conducted two archive Roadshows (see Section 4.3) with the intention of seeking more funding to enable them to expand this programme. The Roadshows combine organisational profile raising with raising awareness of women's archives and could lead to further personal and organisational archive donations under the guise of their scheme.

In relation to the donation of women's archives, Mason found that

...most people have never given a thought to their papers. Many do not even know what an archives [sic] is, and if they do, they do not realise they have anything that might be of value for historical research. ... This is especially true of women who cannot imagine they have ever done anything that merits remembering outside their home. (Mason, 2002, p. 26)

Furthermore, "[i]t takes time to identify leads, establish contacts, visit with potential donors, and persuade them of the value of donating their papers" (Mason, 2002, p. 27).

Raising the awareness of the value of women's documents therefore could be feasible, but again, sufficient funding would be needed to perhaps employ one or more members of staff, the provision of office space, and funds to conduct marketing and to network with women's groups in Wales. A booklet (guide) explaining the importance of women's documents, and providing guidelines for women's organisations as to how to look after their own records, along the lines of the New Zealand booklet, is one possible development option (see Berzins, 1995).

In terms of the issues that were considered under Option 1 (e.g. funding, professional issues), the option of strengthening AMC/WAW's core work areas could be advantageous. With regard to funding, although developing their projects would require funding, this would be on a much smaller scale than if a physical women's library or archive was established. Furthermore, depositing material in established repositories e.g. local record offices, ensures the continuation of professional care for the material as well as regular access for the public. Other professional issues such as employing qualified staff is also taken care of under this scheme and there would be greater opportunity for engaging with the archive profession. The AMC/WAW system of regional deposits of material also overcomes geographical issues as no single area is favoured because all counties have local record offices. Material of national significance is deposited in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, and is in mid Wales. The issue of the Welsh language would perhaps still need to be addressed, possibly by ensuring that marketing material and campaigns are developed in both languages. It should be noted that AMC/WAW do currently have a bilingual policy and all their documentation is provided in both English and Welsh.

The one area that may bring less enthusiasm for this option is in the area of engagement with feminism. This option does not seek to create a women's space or a creation of resources specifically for women, which is a key feature of the women's libraries in the British Isles. However, the objectives of AMC/WAW are centred upon raising awareness of the value of women's history and rescuing documents about women's lives so that the history of women in Wales is not lost. Thus this commitment to feminism would not be completely abandoned by strengthening the AMC/WAW organisation.

One final point to consider is an example from one of the other women's libraries. In 1976 the Fawcett Society decided at the AGM to take up the London School of Economics' (LSE) proposal to house the Fawcett Library. However, members of the Fawcett Library were angry about the LSE proposal as it would disperse the collection and dispose of duplicate material. The members therefore pressed for a

special general meeting and voted to go to the City of London Polytechnic, whose bid had originally been too late to be considered (Stott, 1987, pp. 221-222). Thus the notion of a dispersed collection does not appeal to some people. Yet a dispersed approach is the one taken by AMC/WAW. In Wales, as there has never been a single united collection, the issue of material being distributed across Wales may not pose ideological or theoretical dilemmas.

6.5.2 *Women in Jazz*

The strengthening of Women in Jazz is currently in process. A few months after the interview with the founder of the archive, the organisation won a two year grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the post of Heritage Development Officer to run the *Wales, Slavery and its Music* project. The founder, Jen Wilson, was appointed as the new officer. In terms of their future, she stated that:

Well, my grand vision would obviously be a building, somewhere on the maritime quarter [in Swansea] ... even if it's in somebody else's building, because we, the thing is with this, although we're eternally grateful to the city for looking after us, we can't have public access up here, with the stairs. And, you know, everything is on top of us. If there was somebody sitting here researching we can't do any work, you know what I mean. It just needs staffing and this is what the trustees are now taking on board.

Whilst the new funding is not for moving the archive into a new building, it does facilitate more research being conducted on the collections through the establishment of a paid position. With more research being published about the history of the jazz movement in Wales, and the history of women in jazz, the profile of the archive should be increased. This may lead to a need for improved public access, and thus the development of new space for the archive.

An issue that needs attention here is whether men would be allowed access to the Women in Jazz archive, if it was housed in a new building that was for other women's organisations, or was part of the Women's Archive of Wales. Jen Wilson believes the jazz archive needs to be in a mixed-sex building because one of the key aims of the jazz archive is to convince men that there were, and are, women involved in jazz. She argues that this "re-education of men" could not take place if men were not allowed in to use the building or the archive. "So I, I really do

advocate that men know about it and can come and use it.” This would suggest that should a women’s library or archive be created in one building, there may be differing views over access for men. For example, some collections donated under the AMC/WAW initiative have restrictions over access.

In addition, as was explored in section 6.4 above in relation to a physical women’s archive building, there would be a number of issues such as professional care of the material, regular access hours for the public, appointment of professionally qualified staff, computer catalogues etc that would all need to be fully considered before deciding to create a more publicly-accessible Women in Jazz archive. These sorts of issues are currently relevant as the archive already exists in a physical location, is not staffed by qualified archivists, there is no computer catalogue of the material, and conditions for different types of materials e.g. performance gowns, records, sheet music, are far from ideal. Thus, attention to issues such as professional standards and collection management suggests that Women in Jazz would benefit from development and strengthening of its core current activities and position in order to place it on a more professional level. As it is the only jazz archive in Britain that collects material in all media, it could strengthen its links with other existing jazz archives and raise its profile within Britain.

6.5.3 Swansea Multicultural Women’s Resource and Training Centre

Swansea Women’s Centre (SWC⁴) also has potential to expand and strengthen its core services. It has a number of projects such as providing general advice, support and information for women on a range of issues, including domestic violence, education, health, legal advice and sexual health. It also arranges legal advice and offers training courses and volunteer opportunities. Most of these services could be expanded, given more funding. Its library and information resource collection could also be considerably strengthened e.g. in terms of quantity, quality and scope. The building housing the Centre has recently been redeveloped to provide wheelchair access and the library has moved to a ground floor position. It is however, only in

⁴ Swansea Women’s Centre is the name used on websites, by other agencies and by staff at SWC, despite the longer official name.

one room and is therefore still quite a small collection. At the time of interviewing, there was no budget for books or other information resources. This aspect could also be strengthened.

As the Swansea Women's Centre is very similar in outlook and service provision to Glasgow Women's Library, it is relevant to look at the latter to consider what options might be possible for SWC. Glasgow Women's Library has created a programme of lifelong learning courses that attract a considerable number of people to the library. In fact, the staff felt that most women using the library were coming for these courses. This is therefore one option for Swansea, if it could seek funding to provide trainers and a varied programme of courses for women. Like Glasgow Women's Library, SWC is in an area where there is social deprivation, exclusion and low expectations or work opportunities. For example, statistics from National Assembly for Wales show that on the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation, the Swansea area (and much of south Wales as a whole) is placed within the 'most deprived' category (National Assembly for Wales, n. d.-c, n. p.). It may be possible to draw on this position by creating a programme of courses and services that seek to empower women, whether by improving their skills, employment opportunities, or helping with personal issues. SWC also works with ethnic minority women and there may be potential to undertake more joint ventures with Mewn Cymru (Minority Ethnic Women's Network Wales) which is an umbrella body representing ethnic minority women across Wales. In fact, Mewn Cymru had been looking to establish a women's building in Swansea, although they have offices in Cardiff (HQ), Newport, Swansea and North Wales (no location on their website for the North Wales office (MEWN Cymru, n. d., n. p.). One interviewee noted that this had yet not developed into firm plans.

...they've been talking for a long time about getting a women's building in Swansea for example, and I think at one stage that was floated and would we want a space in there.

Having a women's building that housed a variety of women's organisations and SWC could be beneficial in terms of improving links and networks, and providing a range of different services and opportunities. As was noted in section 6.4, the notion of a women's space with multiple uses and users is not new, and there have been

previous examples e.g. the Women's Service House in London in the 1920s-1940s, and examples in London in the 1970s and 1980s. This sort of development is evidence of close engagement with feminist issues and could be possible in an urban area like Swansea where there are several women's groups.

Other options for the strengthening of Swansea Women's Centre includes developing the centre to become national rather than focused on one city. This would call for significant funding and could be difficult to achieve unless the Centre had clear objectives as to how it would be able to serve women across Wales, given the relatively poor north-south transport links:

... the trunk road network in mid and north Wales in recent years, [is] ..., for the most part, inadequate... .(National Assembly for Wales, 2001, n. p.)

A number of issues would need to be addressed such as more paid staff, range of services offered, location of services (would everything be provided in Swansea?), language provision (would material and services be provided in Welsh and English?) and so on. It may also be important to consider whether a national women's centre would remain in south Wales or relocate to mid or north Wales? The same cultural and geographical issues apply here as were discussed in Section 6.4.6 above in relation to a women's library in Wales. Given these potential problems, perhaps a more achievable and practical aim would be to strengthen the Centre's influence and position within a wider *regional* area i.e. expand its coverage beyond Swansea and the immediate environs to include Cardiff and a larger area of South Wales. This would increase the number of potential users of the Centre and could raise its profile in areas that may be culturally, socially and economically similar to Swansea and thus call for similar services. As was discussed in Section 1.11.3, Cardiff and other towns in Wales used to have women's centres in the 1970s and 1980s, but all bar Swansea have now closed. This may be partly due to the perceived decline in demand for women's spaces. However, the success and survival of other women's centres e.g. Aberdeen, Cambridge, Hull, Nottingham, Salford (see <http://www.shebytes.com>) suggests that women do still use women-only spaces for a variety of purposes. Enhancing SWC's provision of training programmes and other

outreach services may well therefore have potential for meeting these women's needs.

6.5.4 Other women's groups and networks

In addition to strengthening the organisations that are currently most involved with the field of women's information and archives there could be the possibility of enhancing other related women's organisations, as well as improving networking and links between relevant groups. In the international literature, networking has been found to be an essential tool for women's development.

Networking among women's groups has ... been one of the most important ways for sharing ideas, experiences and strategies within the women's movement. Women began to link with other like-minded women within their own regions and finding common grounds. (George, 2003, p. 2)

This is particularly important when we consider the findings from the research in England and Scotland which highlighted the potential isolation of women's libraries and archives, and their relatively low profile, even among women's circles or library circles.

For example, the Women's Workshop - Cardiff Training Centre was founded in the 1980s and currently provides computer training courses for women. Collaboration between this organisation and Swansea Women's Centre could enhance the potential services offered by SWC, and increase the potential users of the Cardiff centre⁵. Women's groups that have their own personal information and resource collection could be encouraged to collaborate, and donate archives under the AMC/WAW scheme e.g. BAWSO - Black Association of Women Step Out, and Welsh Women's Aid branches. There are also several women's organisations within the economic, political and business sectors e.g. Chwarae Teg (Fair Play), Wales Women's National Coalition (WWNC) and Wales Assembly of Women that could be brought together in networks. Improved links or networks between these like-minded groups could enable more outreach services to be provided, perhaps to reach women outside

⁵ References in Hansard for 4th April 2005 state that the Women's Workshop has suffered funding cuts this year (Parliamentary debates – Hansard, 2005, column 1169)

of the urban centres. This idea is related to the notion of community information networks (Pantry, 1999) and communities of practice whereby likeminded individuals and small groups work together, formally and informally, for their mutual benefit.

Whilst in conversation with the women of the information/archive organisations in Wales, it became evident that there was potential for improved links between women's organisations in Wales, and that some sort of online directory or website that facilitated improved communication flows and highlighted who else is doing what in Wales would be beneficial.

Although AMC/WAW do not currently have the resources to become an umbrella body as identified in this quote, there could be potential for the development of a resource that provided links to, and information about, other women's organisations and groups in Wales, and indeed across Britain. This could range from quite traditional women's groups such as the Women's Institute and the Welsh-language equivalent (Merched y Wawr), to the lesbian/bisexual newsletter *WomenZone*, produced by a team based at, but independent of, Swansea Women's Centre. The research and resources needed to construct a directory would be considerable at the outset, but once the data had been collated, it could be relatively easy to maintain such a database. A women's directory for Wales was printed in 1984 (see Chapter 2), but it does not appear to have been updated. If women's organisations in Wales had access to a database or directory of other women's groups, it could help facilitate networking, collaborative projects, reduce any potential isolation, and raise the profile of all those involved. This last point is particularly relevant to the women's libraries and archives who, in England and Scotland, are often not extensively well known. Various directories of women's organisation or groups have been published in Britain recently (e.g. the *Everywomen Directory 1992-1993* *Women mean business* and *Women's Organisations in the United Kingdom 2003: a directory* published by the Women's National Commission (which is an Advisory Committee to Her Majesty's Government) but none specifically focused on Wales. The potential for a directory for Wales, aimed at individual women and

organisations is therefore considerable. It is also relevant to note that Glasgow Women's Library in partnership with Engender and the Scottish Executive took responsibility in 2001 to overhaul and manage a new comprehensive database of over 800 women's organisations throughout Scotland (Glasgow Women's Library, 2001, p. 1). This is therefore perhaps a suitable project for a similar organisation in Wales. (A list of women's organisations in Wales that have an element of information provision is provided in Appendix 6.)

In addition to a paper (and electronic) directory of women's groups in Wales, there may be scope for the development of a focused digital library of information relevant to women. Bishop et al trialled the development of a virtual community-based women's health library in America, particularly to overcome issues of the 'digital divide' (Bishop et al, 2001). They noted that a "major barrier" for the African American women in their study was the "perceived lack of information that was conveniently available, jargon-free, relevant and culturally appropriate" (Bishop et al, 2001, section 'Implications for the development of a community-based digital library'). By developing a tailored website to meet their health information needs the case study was able reach a variety of women to help improve their health, and the participatory action research approach meant the resource was developed in consultation with the women who would be using it. If a women's digital library was to be developed in Wales, it would need to be focused i.e. for particular types of information (health, legal, financial) and be developed in consultation with women and potential users.

This leads into a much larger area, that of the role of women's magazines and women's websites as vehicles for information, which would be an avenue for future research (see Marcella, 2002). Websites targeted specifically at women were present in the early days of the Internet. For example, WIRES (Women's Information Resource & Exchange) was established in 1993 as an online resource providing information on health, the Internet, careers and work, arts, leisure, parenting,

biographies to women in America etc (Balas, 1994)⁶. This adoption of ICT by women can be seen more recently in a number of formerly print-only feminist or women's journals and magazines turning towards producing electronic versions, in conjunction with, or in replacement of, the hard copy (Gibbons, 2003), suggesting that electronic sources are increasingly a preference for women today. It has been argued that ICT (and the facilities of the Internet) can be seen as being a 'global room of our own' for women (Scott, quoting Arizpe in Scott, 2001, p. 413) but whilst ICT may change the social landscape it also contributes to social inequalities (Scott, 2001, p. 413). Electronically available information sources may therefore not necessarily overcome the barriers of access to information faced by different groups of women, and do not necessarily meet either the community/social or academic/research information needs of women.

6.5.5 Summary for Option 2: strengthening existing organisations

The options for strengthening the three current organisations involved in women's information are all dependent upon money. However, the investment is likely to be less in terms of overall cost compared with the expense of establishing a wholly new women's library or archive in a physical building. As the infrastructures are already in place, the organisations would be able to capitalise on their known profile rather than having to develop from scratch. There is also potential to improve the networking between various women's groups in Wales and to collaborate on joint projects. However, development of any of the women's organisations specified would need money, and although cases could be made e.g. for social inclusion, heritage reasons, it is not guaranteed that funding would be provided by bodies such as the National Assembly for Wales, the Arts Council of Wales, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Welsh Development Agency and so on. Furthermore, as was noted in the findings from England and Scotland, whilst one-off funding is useful, relying on grants for service provision and development can leave organisations vulnerable to economic, social or political changes if their projects are no longer deemed so relevant or important. Thus, as with Option 1, money is central for any enhancement to the existing organisations to occur.

⁶ The founder of WIRES, Ellen Pack, turned WIRES into an Internet publishing company, Wire Networks, Inc. (Nasbic, 1997, n. d.) Its first branded site, www.women.com now appears to be re-directed to www.ivillage.com, a women's interest website.

6.6 Option 3 – enhance existing library and archive organisations

Whilst the previous two options are based on developing existing women's archives and information centres, a third option is to focus on current mainstream providers of information and archives and to enhance these in terms of services for women. This option acknowledges that women's information and archives are important, but maximises use of current providers e.g. public libraries, the National Library of Wales and local record offices, rather than developing separatist organisations. This may be the most efficient in terms of finances, although it does not address the issue of separate women's spaces.

6.6.1 Public libraries

Findings from the literature suggest that public libraries, whilst excellent resources for a range of information, have not always been seen by women as containing specific information for them (see Chapter 2 Section 2.4.6). Evidence from a feminist librarian's mailing list (feministlibrarians@yahoo.co.uk, which ceased operation in August 2004) suggests that public libraries do not necessarily contain material that would be sought by some women and thus there may be potential to develop this area.

In order to improve provision for women, surveys would need to be conducted with female users (and non-users) of public libraries to discover what their information needs are, whether these needs are met by public libraries, and if not, what resources the women use to find information. The results from such a survey would hopefully indicate whether women's information needs were being met, and if not, what services could be developed in order to meet the women's needs. However, this option assumes that the role of a women's library is to merely provide information and ignores other reasons why a woman might visit a women's library. Users of such libraries may deliberately seek out a women's space, or the extra facilities on offer. Despite the lack of provision for a women's space, this option has the advantage of building on a well-developed and extensive public library service in Wales with national geographical coverage (although some rural areas may only be

served by a mobile library service), and professionally maintained services and collections.

Referral and other 'community' services are also increasingly offered by public libraries in the UK, and with some expansion, could be tailored to deliver services that some of the women's centres offer such as IT training, advice sessions and referral services. King notes that although public libraries in the UK were traditionally seen as "educational and cultural institutions" they began to take on more information functions after World War II, especially in relation to daily information needs, as Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) were "often developed or housed in public libraries in Great Britain during and after World War II" (King, 1995, p. 181). As some of the women's libraries provide services that are similar to Citizens Advice Bureaux, this is a possible option for either the public libraries or CABs to develop.

It is important to bear in mind however, that the "public library is not, as yet, at the top of the pecking order when the typical person is looking for information" (Vavrek, 1995, p. 25). The services of public libraries as a whole may therefore need to be marketed so that it *does* become the key source for all types of information and people.

6.6.2 *The National Library of Wales*

Whereas the above option focuses on the library-element of women's information needs, developing services for women in the National Library of Wales (NLW) is likely to focus on women's archives and thus women's research needs. As has been noted, the NLW is already a member of the AMC/WAW scheme and has received material considered to be of national significance e.g. the papers of author Menna Gallie. In order to improve the quantity of women's archives in the NLW, and the ability to search the catalogues for such material, services could be developed whereby the AMC/WAW name could be used as a search term to bring up the documents donated under their scheme. A more expensive and time-consuming option could be to go through the material in the library, noting where material is

relevant to women, that is, along the lines of the mapping exercise in Ireland. Given the size of the NLW's archives, this would be an extensive project, but would contribute to the awareness of women's archives and women in Welsh history. The NLW could perhaps also undertake collaborative projects with AMC/WAW to increase the awareness of, and the range of, women's documents in the NLW, thus contributing to the aims of AMC/WAW in increasing the amount of material rescued and donated to professional archives. However, all these schemes would require varying levels of funding, commitment and space. As a publicly-funded body, the NLW does not have large sums of excess money that could be spent on new projects, and it is always fundraising to enable it to develop services it has identified as important. It is also short of space, as all national libraries are (see Consortium of Research Libraries in the British Isles, n. d.), and may be unwilling to house more material if that material might be better placed in local record offices.

6.6.3 Local record and archive offices

Several local record offices in Wales are members of the AMC/WAW scheme and have received documents under this organisation's name. However, as only a few record offices are currently involved, it would appear that there is potential to raise awareness of the scheme among all record offices in Wales. As local record offices are distributed across Wales there would be universal coverage and access to women's archives across Wales. The local record offices are also professionally managed with qualified archivists, thus ensuring appropriate conditions for any material that is donated. Local record offices may well be willing to take part in the AMC/WAW scheme and it is therefore perhaps important for AMC/WAW to develop clear guidelines with regard to their acceptance and donation procedures – something they have achieved since being interviewed (see Appendix 8).

6.6.4 Summary of Option 3: developing existing library and archive services

The potential for improving services to women in public libraries, and for facilitating the depositing of women's archives could be developed, if suitable funding was found in order to make the necessary changes or to implement new schemes. It would also ensure the professional care of archives and resources, and

would be building on well-established organisations that are distributed across Wales. However, these options do not address the element of women's-spaces as places of their own, or the model of meeting contemporary women's wider social needs as witnessed at Glasgow Women's Library. It also does not take into account findings from the literature which suggest that women do not tend to use libraries as sources of information, preferring instead to use informal or formal networks (see Section 2.4.6 in Chapter 2). This is an extremely important point because if women would not use newly developed services in the libraries or local record offices, then it is questionable as to whether such services should be developed. As a consequence, the issue of creating a women's library is also brought into question. The implications of this, and the various options, are discussed below.

Any development of women's libraries or archives in Wales also needs to be considered in relation to current library and archive developments in Britain as a whole. Public libraries for example, are increasingly involved with literacy (both adult and child) with various national reading campaigns taking place e.g. the National Reading Campaign, the Summer Reading campaigns, School Reading Champions, and the joint BBC and public libraries RaW campaign (Read more And Write better) which began in Autumn 2005. Many public libraries also take part in the annual World Book Day event (held in March). The People's Network has installed 32,000 computer terminals in public libraries in the UK, meeting a wide range of community needs, and is credited by some as increasing the usage of public libraries (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, 2002, pp. 3, 6, 12). But, whilst recent Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) statistics show that public library visitor numbers have increased for the last two years, the number of books being issued continues to fall. In 2003/04, visits to public libraries in the UK increased by nearly 14 million, with over 250,000 extra visits a week, but book borrowing fell by 5% (MLA, 2005, n. p.). Recent private consultancy and Government reports, and subsequent debate in the national broadsheet newspapers, continue to either predict the end of the public library or outline negative visions for the future (BBC, 2000, n. d.; Coates, 2002; MLA, 2005b). In 2003 the Government launched its *Framework for the Future*, the first

ever national public library strategy, which set out a long-term strategic vision for the public library service in England. The Government's *Third Report of the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee, Session 2004-05: Public Libraries* outlines the commitment to libraries, including investing in new buildings, revision of the standards to measure public libraries and the commitment to social and community improvement (TSO, 2005).

In Wales, similarities can be seen in the range of extra schemes developed by public libraries (e.g. outreach library services in local Tesco stores in Newport) and in the creation of CyMAL, which has responsibility for museums, archives and libraries in Wales. Its work includes providing advice and support services on issues such as standards, collection policies, access and ICT. The library sector in Wales is working towards improving access to the whole population by extending opening hours, participating in lifelong learning ventures and encouraging reading programmes among a range of targeted groups (National Assembly for Wales, 2003, n. p.), therefore there may be opportunities to develop targeted services to women.

6.7 In conclusion, what is the potential for Wales?

Although some of the literature suggests that women do not use libraries as a source of information (see Chapter 2 section 2.4.6), the continued existence of women's libraries and archives in the British Isles and across the world would indicate that there are many women who use these institutions and that they serve certain purposes. As has been established, it is possible to discern different models for women's libraries, archives or centres, and the purpose (or model) for such an institution in Wales is central to the debate. The question is, therefore, not just 'is there potential for a women's library/archive/centre?' but also, 'what *type* of institution would it be?'

Section 6.4 above outlined the potential advantages and disadvantages of establishing a women's library or archive in a single building in Wales. One member of staff at an existing women's library suggested that to create a new women's

library or archive from scratch would be very difficult, and, it would be unlikely to have established important collections on which to base the collections.

to create a library that is based upon historic collections then clearly you can't do that overnight. ... [S]o, unless you had something like that [historic collections] to build upon you wouldn't be able to create [something] that was like this particular collection. It doesn't mean to say you couldn't have a women's library, but I think it would be a different type of library.

I mean if you want to create a library that deals with women's issues today, and is a focus for, women to go ..., maybe a drop-in centre, it can be all kinds of things.

These quotes suggest that creating a women's centre that was modelled on social-contemporary needs of women, such as that seen at Glasgow Women's Library, might be easier to achieve than a traditional library.

The above quotes also suggest that it would be easier in Wales to enhance existing provision at the women's resource centre rather than to attempt to create a new library or archive. However, as Swansea Women's Resource Centre is much smaller in scale, scope and outlook than Glasgow, its development into a national (all-Wales) resource for women would still take considerable resources. Quotes from women at the various women's libraries also suggest that it is difficult to combine different roles i.e., being an archive and/or library and being a centre with social and community visions (see Section 5.7 in Chapter 5). As Wales has both women's archive organisations and a women's resource centre, it has the potential to develop both models, either independently, or separately.

But, the extent to which a physical women's library in Wales would be used must always be considered. Before any of the options outlined above could be developed into firm plans, surveys would need to be conducted to assess the potential use of these different types of women's libraries or resource centres. Which model or type, if any, of the women's libraries would suit the needs of women in Wales best? To some extent, the type, and possibly number, of users attracted to it would be dependent upon the type or model it emulated. If it was developed as an archive and reference resource it would probably attract researchers and students from across

Wales, whereas a social and community centre may have a more localised regional sphere of influence. Would it, like several in England and Scotland, have a very low profile and low user numbers? Would it be more practical to build on existing organisations and structures rather than to create a new building for women's resources? The quotes below suggest that as it is very hard work to establish a new women's library or centre, developing existing structures may be more practical.

I think if you are willing to work really hard for a long long time you do eventually get taken seriously.

So I think there's a lot of benefit in pointing out where stuff is, and showing people how it can be interesting and how it can be used, and that's very good for, I suppose to use a cliché, for women's empowerment...

I think what the Welsh [Women's] Archive is doing sounds like a very good idea to me, and admirably suited to collections in Wales with collections spread out over the whole [of Wales]...

[B]ecause a lot of women's activities happens on a regional or even quite a local level, then, then it's not, not a bad thing [to have regional women's libraries], but I suppose I would also say that the most important starting point is what collections there are, so I wouldn't try and create something, I might create an electronic map, or, partnership networks...

These quotes suggest that for Wales, perhaps the most practical and beneficial option could be to develop the AMC/WAW model of distributed and formal deposition of material, whilst simultaneously improving networking amongst women's groups in Wales, perhaps with a dedicated website of relevant resources, a directory of women's groups in Wales and their interests, and perhaps a project where relevant resources are mapped (like the Genesis project in the UK and the Women's History Project Ireland). These developments would be likely to improve the awareness of women's archives, the importance of women's history, and the networking between women's groups in Wales.

But, such developments may not address needs that are met within the social-community centre model. With the recent closure of the Feminist Library in London (which, along with Glasgow Women's Library provided examples of the

contemporary-needs model), there may be concern over the actual demand for such women-only spaces. Even though Glasgow Women's Library was established relatively recently (1991) during a period outside of the main era of the feminist movement, it was achieved as a spin-off project from other developments. Thus, it may be hard to artificially create a women's centre if there is little grassroots support to provide the momentum. Nonetheless, the existence of the Swansea Women's Centre, and many other women's organisations across Wales would suggest that there is still demand for, and willingness to support, women's issues and women-only organisations.

The potential for a women's library, archive or centre in Wales therefore is dependent on a variety of issues. These primarily include the demand for such services, willingness to develop new services, and the funding to enable such projects to develop. Whilst there are several options for Wales, the potential impracticalities of creating a new women's library in one building would suggest that this is not an appropriate or feasible option. Developing existing women's archive structures could be achieved more easily, as could improving existing formal library and archive institutions to better reflect women's past and present lives. In all situations however, funding, or the lack of it, would be the deciding factor as to what was possible.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Women's health centres and women's libraries and information centres provide a dynamic, diverse and pluralist environment for librarians to reflect on theory and practice within a setting where the provision of information is done differently. ... Nevertheless, being beyond the mainstream, and interacting with that mainstream, is characterized by numerous tensions and conflicts.... (Ilett, 2002, p. 40)

7.1 Introduction

Having considered all the relevant factors it is apposite to return to the original research question posed by this thesis, that is, 'is there potential for a women's library in Wales?' This concluding chapter will draw together and summarise the findings from the literature review, the fieldwork in women's libraries in England, Ireland and Scotland, the fieldwork in Wales as well as analysing the concept of different models of women's libraries. The chapter will also consider the futures for the different women's libraries in the British Isles. It will move forward to discuss various themes that are central to the thesis i.e.: the engagement with librarianship/archive professions and the engagement with feminism displayed by the various women's libraries/archives; separation versus integration for women's libraries, as well as the separation of special libraries from other mainstream libraries. In considering all these factors it will hopefully provide an answer to the research question, as well as highlighting the potential for further research.

7.2 Related research and conclusions from the literature

One seminar at the Kampala Know How Conference focused on the changing role of women's information services. Issues from the discussion included:

- the need for women's information services to bridge the gap between practitioners, academics and policy makers
- the need to develop common standards to enable women's information services to share information across diverse borders (Know How Conference, 2002, p. 29).

Women's information services such as women's libraries, are seen as central to the dissemination of information to women, helping to overcome barriers between women and information. That this is an internationally-agreed issue means that it should be possible to work together across borders to help share information.

The example of shared roles for women's libraries reflects the international nature of the literature of women's information services. The last fifteen years has seen an increase in international networking, collaboration and information sharing. This can be dated from 1991 and the First International Symposium of Women's Libraries. Subsequent conferences have been held across the world in 1994, 1998, 2002, and the next conference will be in Mexico in 2006. Apart from these international conferences, there is little other evidence among the literature of much comparative research. Much of the literature tends to be descriptive narratives focusing on particular women's libraries that are well-known to the authors, who are often involved with the institution about which they are writing. Consequently, the literature is rich in description and provides a wealth of information about a variety of women's libraries and archives, thus creating a detailed picture of these institutions. Despite this, few authors address the theory behind the establishment of women's libraries. As a result, there is some danger that these institutions could be seen to exist and operate in a vacuum, removed from not only library history but also from feminism.

The impact of the nature of the literature on this thesis is that there is very little other comparative research that could provide guidance as to potential research methods, and possible findings. Furthermore, the relative lack of attention to the theory of women's libraries makes it harder to argue for the establishment of a women's library in Wales, although this thesis has sought to provide theoretical reasons for the establishment of women's libraries (see Section 1.4 and 4.2).

One of the prime reasons for establishing women's libraries is their role in meeting women's information needs. Given the relative paucity of research and literature on women's libraries, this related field was also explored. The literature in this field is

also international in nature, but tends to have a more rigorous academic nature. Various methods are used to investigate women's information needs, and the types of women who are the focus of this literature is highly diverse (see list in Section 2.4.4 in Chapter 2), yet, there are common findings. The research suggests that women tend to seek information through informal sources and networks, and may not use a library when seeking information. This has potential implications for the role and usage of women's libraries across the world. Unfortunately, despite the close nature of these two fields, and the implications for women's libraries and resource centres, there appears to be little linkage between the two fields. This thesis therefore attempted to bridge this gap in relating findings from one field to the other, and discussing these in relation to the potential for establishing a women's library in Wales. It was important to consider the broader and related research as a women's library could not operate in a vacuum and would need to be engaged with the worlds of libraries and women's issues to be successful.

7.3 Findings from current women's libraries in the British Isles

In order to ascertain whether there is potential for a women's library in Wales, it was important to consider the current position of women's libraries in the British Isles, to analyse their success, their roles, and their futures. This provided a contemporary comparative context for exploring the situation in Wales.

A central theme that arose from the research was the development of various models of women's libraries. Their disparate nature generated three core models:

- archive-based research institutions
- socially-orientated community-based resource centres
- virtual archive collections

Within these three models there are variations but core similarities remain. The importance of understanding the existence of different models is that it is central to the consideration of which, if any, might be most appropriate for Wales. The difficulty is that the concept of a 'women's library' is complex, even for those involved with libraries or women's issues, and each person may imagine a different

type of institution when faced with the idea of a 'women's library'. It was important therefore to discover what these different institutions do, how they operate, who they serve, and what their purposes are, in order to establish the potential for a women's library in Wales.

The existence of these different models creates a dilemma for Wales as it means it is not simply a matter of assessing whether there is potential for a women's library in Wales, but, what *sort* of women's library would be most appropriate. There are advantages to each of the three types of women's libraries, but, it is not possible to assimilate all the characteristics of them into one single organisation. From a feminist perspective, it could be seen to be advantageous for all three types to be developed in Wales, but the resource implications for this would be immense. There may also be some strength to the argument that the heyday for some elements of a women's library have passed. This is reflected in the recent closure of the Feminist Library, and the uncertain future of the Feminist Archive South. In light of these events, the creation of a new physical women's library or archive in Wales looks less sensible or appropriate.

The origins of the women's libraries in the British Isles varies temporally and theoretically. In Britain, the two main phases for feminism during the twentieth century provided the context and impetus for establishing women's libraries. Whilst similar institutions may have been created from the late 1980s onwards (i.e., after the second wave of feminism), they are generally rather different in nature. Rather than campaigning for a physical building for a women's library or archive, both Archif Menywod Cymru/Women's Archive of Wales (AMC/WAW) and the Women's History Project Ireland have concentrated on 'virtual' collections and a distributed approach. Consequently, it is important to consider whether the time for establishing a physical women's space is no longer pertinent, and whether alternative approaches to a women's library might be more appropriate for today's society, and for today's technology.

Whilst the women's libraries all aim to serve women, their objectives may vary from aiming to provide contemporary resources, training and a sense of community and women's only space, to providing a detailed history of women through archives and research. The existence of three models of women's libraries in Britain is directly related to the differences in their aims. Thus, it is very important when considering the situation in Wales to establish what sort of women's library would be desirable or appropriate. Whilst there is an element of overlap in roles, the principal aim of each women's library influences what type of institution it is. A women's library is very different from a women's archive, which is again very different from a women's resource centre.

I would think Glasgow's a bit like that, do provide support for people who need a place, you know, something to be attached to, belong to, and that is very different from running a professional, academic library.

Glasgow Women's Library is wonderful, but it's completely different from an archive. What they are doing is liaising with local women, they're doing classes, they're doing an allotment.

...what's happening is they're becoming into a sort of community [pause], not a community centre but very much a community thing, whereas the Women's Library now, you know, ... it's the sort of thing that gets taken seriously, whereas the scruffy little room, the standard of the usual women's centre, we [emphasis] take it seriously, but the great majority of the population doesn't.

Despite these differences in aims and roles, confusion can arise due to the cross-over of names. Thus the Women's Library in London is actually more akin to an archive as it does not lend material and is internationally renowned for its important archives and collections about women. Likewise, Glasgow Women's Library is in fact more similar to a women's resource centre as it provides lifelong learning training, free advice sessions and IT training. Names are important as they provide signals to potential users as to what to expect, and can influence funding decisions (see section 4.6 in Chapter 4). Having a somewhat misleading name may have negative consequences. Thus, for Wales, it is important to consider not only what type of women's library might be appropriate, but also what it would be called.

The research also revealed the importance of management issues to the success of women's libraries. Those with staff hierarchies or more formal structures such as a board of management tended to be slightly more secure in terms of their future position e.g. the Women's Library, whereas those that operated with less or no hierarchy e.g. such as collectives, tended to face repeated crises in management, staffing, funding and future survival e.g. the Feminist Library. Whilst the success of a women's library does not solely depend upon having structured management, the tendency to rely upon volunteers or a core collective may lead to an institution being weaker when facing difficult problems, or to difficulties in co-ordinating development programmes. For example, during late 2003 Glasgow Women's Library restructured their staff to create the post of Strategic Development Worker:

...because we need to move building and we need to massively fundraise. And we need to look at some internal re-organisation issues, so for example, we don't have a clear ... line management system, so nobody's nobody's boss, here, really. But we're not a collective, so we need to look at brining in some structure into that, to maybe help co-ordinate the projects...

It is often the case that styles of management suited to feminist principles e.g. no hierarchy, are found in the women's libraries that identify more strongly with feminism. For Wales, the management structure of any new women's library, or the development of current relevant organisations would need to be considered. Would the commitment to feminism extend to the management structure, or would it be sufficient for feminism to be the reason *for* the creation of a women's library rather than infusing the management style?

To some extent, this issue is also related to the question of ownership or independence. The research found that in general, the independent institutions tended also to be those which identified with feminism, whilst those attached to a university or other institution tended to have more traditional management structures and approaches to organisation. This is an important issue to consider not only in terms of the implications for funding, but also in relation to the idea of separatism or integration, which is a key debate in women's studies.

Funding is inevitably the most important issue for women's libraries. The staff all emphasised the importance of sufficient funding to ensure the continued existence of the institution. But funding can do more than just enable an organisation to function, it can also affect its future development. The prime example of this is the change in fortunes for the Fawcett Library from a cramped basement and a relatively low-key profile to a purpose-built building and national attention in the media. Lack of funding can not only curtail services, but it can also force closure, as was the case for the Feminist Library. Consequently, in Wales, the issue of where funding would come from and how secure it would be in the long-term is critical. Without a regular source of income, the creation of a physical women's library, or the extension of current relevant organisations is highly unlikely.

The strength of the women's libraries may not lie in their financial situations, but rather in their collections. The quality of library and archive collections is possibly the principal consideration for users. Thus the women's libraries with significant archive collections can provide researchers with excellent resources. The rescuing and preservation of documents relating to women's lives is one of the key purposes for some of the women's libraries. Likewise, collections of contemporary material in the women's libraries that operate as resource centres are also noteworthy for their contribution towards contemporary women's lives. However, in both cases, the exploitation of the collections may be hindered by the lack of computer catalogues and accurate stocklists. Furthermore, few of the women's libraries had formal collection development policies, which may lead to haphazard collecting and weeding of material. Many of the libraries were also unable to formalise a book budget, relying on donations or short-term project money to purchase material. This again could lead to gaps in the collection. As most of the women's libraries see themselves as unique or fulfilling a particular need, it could be assumed that they would seek to provide a definite collection in their field.

For Wales, these issues are important, but perhaps of more importance is where the sources would come from if a physical women's library were to be created. Not only does this have financial implications, but also logistical and practical concerns. As

was explored in depth in Chapter 6, creating a brand new women's library in Wales could be very difficult, given that important archives are currently housed in other archives and libraries, and it may not be desirable for them to be relocated. Furthermore, creating a resource of contemporary material would be costly and there would need to be consideration of the importance of provision of electronic resources as well as hard-copy material. It is significant that both the more recent women's archive organisations have opted for virtual rather than physical collections. In Wales, AMC/WAW seek to rescue relevant material and ensure its professional care in established archive or library repositories. Although many of the founding members see a women's library building as a 'dream', they recognise the practical and professional issues involved and have selected a procedure that maximises their resources within current library and archive provision in Wales.

Their current strategy is also suited to the structure of the organisation in that the management committee of AMC/WAW is run entirely by volunteers. This is similar to many of the other women's libraries and archives, except that the other women's libraries also manage physical libraries. As was examined in Chapter 4 and 5, relying entirely on volunteers can be a risk. In addition to the voluntary status of many of those working in women's libraries, it was also found that many of the staff and volunteers did not have professional library or archive qualifications. The Women's History Project in Ireland made a specific point of employing qualified archivists, in order to gain the respect of the profession. There are two important issues here: one is that the lack of formal professional qualifications among staff may lead to incorrect procedures and inadequate attention to issues such as preservation, conservation and cataloguing; the second issue is that by not requiring workers to have the relevant qualifications, it may send out signals that the organisation is not entirely committed to professionalism in libraries and archives. As will be discussed below, this is one area that reveals the lack of engagement with librarianship and the archive profession. If Wales were to establish a women's library, it would perhaps be sensible to employ professionally qualified staff, thus ensuring the appropriate standards of library and archive work are in place, and

indicating to potential users, funders and supporters that the organisation is engaged with the relevant profession and should be taken seriously.

It is perhaps unfortunate that user numbers appear to be declining in some of the women's libraries. However, an accurate picture cannot be fully ascertained as few of the women's libraries conducted surveys measuring usage. And some of the women's libraries have seen a recent increase in numbers, due to either expanding service provision (e.g. at Glasgow Women's Library) or with the opening of a new, large purpose-built building e.g. the Women's Library. The implications for Wales of declining user numbers could be that these types of institutions are required less now than they formerly were, yet whilst some women's libraries are growing, it is hard to generalise as to what the current situation may be. In addition, none of the women's libraries felt that they had specific categories of typical users as they attracted a variety of different women. But again, without formal user surveys assessing who the users are, what services and facilities they use etc, it is difficult to target groups of non-users, and difficult to tailor services to users and non-users needs. In considering the options for Wales, it must be borne in mind that the perception may be that there is no longer a need for a physical women's library. Furthermore, its usage would depend upon its identity, aims and roles. An archive-based research library would attract different women from a resource-centre community-based women's space. Thus, the question of identity and aims affects more than just the collection.

Whilst the women's libraries and archives in the British Isles are diverse in nature and outlook, there is an element of networking and communication between them. However, such networking is often at the level of exchange of newsletters and personal communication, and there is little evidence of larger collaborative projects e.g. inter-library loans. This may be seen as surprising, given their relatively isolated position outside of mainstream libraries. The implications for Wales are that should a new women's library be created, there may not be an active or strong network across Britain that could offer support and advice. Although there is informal support and encouragement, the lack of an established network may well be due to

lack of resources in order to create and maintain one. However, the Genesis project, recently established by the Women's Library has provided avenues for links, collaboration and networking and it may be possible to develop further links based on this network.

Relationships between the various women's libraries also appear to be slightly tense since the awarding of £4.2 million to the Women's Library. Prior to this the women's libraries were similarly all restricted by lack of money, and the benefits from the development of one of them do not, as yet, appeared to have trickled down to the other institutions.

The physical space of the Women's Library is a prominent element that has changed with the awarding of the HLF grant. There are differences in style and spatial issues between some of the research-orientated women's libraries and those that are more similar to resource centres. Whilst negative reactions to both types of spaces were sometimes hinted at during the interviews, it is possible to see how the different physical spaces are suited to different women and their differing needs. For example, pictures of the new Women's Library convey an image of a spacious library suitable for quiet independent research and study (see Section 4.11), whereas pictures of Glasgow Women's Library portray an image of a small community, meeting over a cup of tea by the wood burning stove. As both libraries have aims that are quite different, their physical spaces need to be aligned to these aims in order to attract their target audience.

For Wales, unless creating a physical women's library was deemed to be appropriate, the issue of the physical space is not of immediate relevance. It is important however, for those women's institutions in Wales that are open to the public e.g. Women in Jazz and Swansea Women's Centre. They must also consider access to their building. At the time of interviewing, Swansea Women's Centre was being renovated to accommodate disabled access, but the current location of the Women in Jazz offices entails going up several flights of stairs. With the recent addition to the Disability Discrimination Act in October 2004, service providers,

including those with 15 or fewer employees and anyone who provides a service to the public will need to ensure that reasonable adjustments – such as adapting premises, removing physical barriers or providing the service another way – are made so that disabled people can use the service. Therefore, not only would this influence the creation of a physical library in Wales, but, may have already had an impact on the SWC whose council-owned building was refurbished in summer 2004 to comply with the new legislation. The issue of physical space is therefore more than the image presented by the actual space, as it can also influence the number and type of potential users who can access the resources held by an organisation.

7.4 Engagement with feminism and relevance of feminism

The investigation into women's libraries in Wales revealed more than the existence of different types of women's libraries. It also uncovered the varying degrees of engagement the women's libraries have with feminism. Whilst they all have roots in the principles and ideals of feminism (e.g. empowering women, equal rights), they approach the solutions to social and cultural conditions in different ways. Thus some of the women's libraries concentrate on rescuing and preserving women's documents and archives, whilst others focus on the skills and confidence of women to improve their current situations. Both approaches are equally valid, although some of the women interviewed saw their approach as more beneficial, or more closely connected to women and feminism.

However, despite the women's libraries close connections to feminism, this engagement is not always highly visible or reciprocal. For example, the profile of the women's libraries is fairly low, even within feminist circles and they are rarely mentioned or referred to in feminist literature (see Chapter 2). They may also be known about within local (geographical) circles, but their influence is rarely regional or national, despite many of their collections being of national significance. Furthermore, they could be considered to be under-used, particularly by feminist researchers. Some of the women interviewed, although engaged with women's studies or women's history, had not been to many, or any of the women's libraries.

If women who believe in, and are committed to, feminist principles do not use these institutions, then why would a woman with little interest in feminism visit such a library or archive? As a consequence of these factors, it could be considered that whilst the women's libraries are engaged with feminist ideas, elements of the feminist movement are not always fully engaged with the women's libraries.

7.5 Engagement with librarianship/archive professions

It is likely that the actual, or perceived, feminist nature of women's health centres, women's libraries and others has prevented their activities and developments being anything more than of minor interest to many within the profession. (Ilett, 2002, p. 39)

Despite their unique structure and outlook, women's libraries and archives are by their nature, part of the library and archive profession. Many of their services mirror services and facilities in academic, public or specialist libraries. Their chosen names also indicate that they are designed and operate as libraries or archives. As a consequence, one would expect to see similar standards and professional engagement in terms of access hours, computer catalogues, qualified staff etc. However, as was discussed in Chapter 4, many of the women's libraries do not display the same degree of professionalism as public or academic libraries. Moreover, it is possible to see that there is a slight disengagement from the profession, which, as with the links with feminism, may operate both ways. For example, there is virtually no research or references to women's libraries and archives within the literature of these professions. As with feminism, if the main movement that underpins the characteristics of these institutions is not engaged with or interested in them, it could be argued that they are operating in a vacuum.

One reason for this is connected to the question of separation or integration of matters relating to women. As noted previously, this has been a source for continuous debate within the feminist movement (from the early 1900s) and there is no agreement on which position is best. Should the women's libraries seek to remain independent, at the risk of being seen as a ghetto, or should they attempt to integrate more with mainstream (mixed) academic and public libraries, at the risk of losing

their unique quality of focusing solely on women? Each argument has its strengths and weaknesses. In the case of the existing women's libraries, it may be that both routes are appropriate for different libraries given their different circumstances e.g. the Women's Library to remain as a independent building, yet part of a university, and the less financially- and resource-secure Feminist Archive (South) to be integrated into a local university, perhaps maintaining the collection in a separate room. In addition, whilst the library profession appears to be mostly unaware of women's libraries, the feelings of those working in the women's libraries suggest that they are more aligned to other networks, and do not always see themselves as librarians or information workers (Ilett, 2002, p. 38-39). This could account for some of two-way disinterest in librarianship.

For Wales, the question of separation or integration is fuzzy. AMC/WAW operate within the mainstream professions of libraries and archives as their distributed approach to collection and deposition of material is based upon the network of local record and archive offices and the National Library of Wales. Yet a key concept of the founding of AMC/WAW is the importance of women's history, writing the women into the history of Wales by focusing specifically on their lives, and this requires some degree of separation of focus. For Women in Jazz the same principles apply in that the founder believes men need access to the archives and the material in order to 're-educate' them as to the role of women in the jazz movement, yet the work focuses specifically on women.

This division can also be seen within librarianship in terms of the divide between specialist and public libraries, and the different position that women's libraries occupy, which was explored in Chapter 5. St Clair considers that:

Special librarians are not only different from others in the workplace, they are different from other librarians and information professionals and, indeed, from others who practise special librarianship. (St Clair, 2001, p. 43).

Staff and services in women's libraries may well be significantly different from public, academic and special libraries, but the differences may be being over-emphasised in the above quote, at the expense of isolating these organisations from a relevant and useful corpus of knowledge and contacts. Whilst the daily work of

librarians in different workplaces may vary, the basic premise of their work – to provide information, or access to it – remains common to them all. It is possible that despite various potential cross-sector connections, women’s libraries actually fail to link to any one of them.

The findings from this research are confirmed by other similar research by Ilett who looked at women’s health centres in the UK and Ireland (Ilett, 2002). She found that these centres often had very strong feminist beginnings, but their commitment to feminism diminished over time. In addition, although they are information providers, there is little linkage between the two sectors. Many used inadequate sexist classification tools as they could not create their own, and also did not employ professionally qualified librarians or have staff that were solely responsible for information (Ilett, 2002, pp. 35-37). She states that:

it is likely that the actual, or perceived, feminist nature of women's health centres, women's libraries and others has prevented their activities and developments being anything more than of minor interest to many within the [library] profession. ... [T]he literature review demonstrates the lack of sustained engagement between feminist theory and mainstream librarianship within Britain. (Ilett, 2002, p. 39)

Ilett’s findings, albeit from slightly different institutions, highlight the findings here – that there is little two-way engagement with either librarianship or with feminism.

7.6 Futures of the women’s libraries

The various women’s libraries and archives all have differing futures. As has been noted earlier, one of the sample closed during the period of the research, after 29 years of service (the Feminist Library 1975-2004). In contrast, the Women’s Library has dramatically reversed its cramped and precarious situation through winning a HLF grant, but the director notes that they still have to fundraise continually to keep the library open. Glasgow Women’s Library has grown considerably since its foundation in 1991, and at the time of interviewing was considering the possibilities of becoming a national (Scottish) organisation rather than city-focused. Its funding was still dependent upon short-term grants. The collection of the Feminist Archive

(South) in Bristol may be preserved if a local university is able to assume responsibility for the material. This process was still not confirmed at the time of writing, and without a long-term supporter, the future for the archive is uncertain. It currently offers minimal opening hours, and relies entirely upon two volunteer staff, both of whom wish to step down from their positions. As a consequence, there is some uncertainty about this archive's survival and future. The Women's Resource Centre in London continues much as before. It relies upon various grants to keep going, and at the time of interviewing had got

...a marketing volunteer in at the moment and we're looking at that, strategy and things like that and there's talk of what [name] we need to be changed to.

Although they have not changed their name, they have expanded their teams, with five teams instead of the three in place in summer 2002 (see descriptions in section 3.10 in Chapter 3). As a result their focus and project work has also expanded. In Ireland, the Women's History Project is, in terms of active work, static, but the database remains in place, hosted by the National Archive of Ireland, thus hopefully ensuring its continued presence. The director hoped to attract another round of funding in order to conduct further mapping of resources to add information about more documents to the database. In terms of its future, providing the host organisation is able to maintain the database, there are not huge resource implications for this archive.

In Wales, the future for the three organisations is less clear. AMC/WAW have achieved several of their founding aims, but the desire to conduct a mapping exercise similar to the project in Ireland remains. Significant funding would be required to achieve this. Furthermore, only a few local record offices currently house material under the AMC/WAW name. AMC/WAW would like more women and organisations to deposit relevant material and for the importance of women's history to be acknowledged more widely. They would also like to be able to employ a permanent officer, and to have at least one office in Wales, in order to raise the profile of the organisation and the value of women's history and archives.

Women in Jazz were successful, during the period of research, in winning a HLF grant for two years, for a full-time heritage development officer. This will ensure their survival for a further few years and enable more research to be conducted on the material in this field. They remain in fairly inaccessible council-owned offices and would like to have a larger profile in Wales.

Swansea Women's Resource Centre has perhaps the most uncertain future of the three. Although it has a few short-term grants, one of which pays for a part-time officer, their resources are quite limited and their sphere of influence is also restricted to the local region. Although it is the only women's centre left in Wales, the closure of others during the 1980s and 1990s indicates, to some extent, that there has been a decline in use of these centres, although the online directory hosted by she-bytes has an extensive list of women's centres across Great Britain (<http://www.shebytes.com/index.html>). It is difficult to judge therefore, the current position of women's centres in the British Isles. SWC has extended its services from direct campaigning in the early years to providing training and support services to women in need and works with a number of disadvantaged women's groups in the area. However, as with all of the women's libraries, its continued future is dependent upon sufficient, long-term funding.

7.7 Options for Wales

The options for Wales are numerous, as outlined in Chapter 6. This thesis has sought to answer the question of whether there is potential for a women's library in Wales. The potential is dependent not only upon existing resources, collections and organisations, but also upon what approaches are practical and possible. It is also dependent upon the question of national 'equity'. The idea for the thesis developed out of an awareness of physical women's libraries existing in England and Scotland and that two of the women's libraries were seeking to become 'national' institutions – one in terms of UK-wide coverage, and the other in terms of Scotland.

With political devolution for Scotland and Wales (of varying degrees), it was pertinent to ask whether Wales should seek to develop a women's library so as to provide women in Wales with similar access to resources that women in England and Scotland are able to enjoy. This idea of 'keeping up' with library developments in England can also be seen in the recent creation of regional (national) bodies overseeing museums, archives and libraries in England, Scotland and Wales. Thus, the notion of Wales matching library developments elsewhere in the British Isles is not unusual or without precedent.

However, what needs to be considered here is how practical and appropriate it would be to match the women's libraries in England, Ireland and Scotland. As has been discussed, the presence of various models of women's libraries represents a choice for Wales, although the existing circumstances in Wales need to be taken into account. Although two of the relevant organisations in Wales currently rent offices, and AMC\WAW had expressed a desire for a physical women's library, they recognised the impracticalities and resource implications involved in such a scheme and it would appear that the time has possibly passed for the creation of a single building housing a women's library and archive in Wales. However, there could be scope for a building to be converted into offices to rent to a wide variety of women's organisations in Wales, thus creating a women's building, facilitating networking and profile-raising, but without the resource implications of creating a women's library in a building.

The future of the women's information organisations investigated in this research depends upon securing further funding. It would be beneficial for future researchers and the history of Wales if AMC\WAW were able to conduct a mapping of archives and material in Wales that relates to women, along the lines of the Women's History Project in Ireland. This could be conducted in conjunction with other archive organisations in Wales to maximise resources. Funding a full or part-time officer for AMC\WAW could also increase membership, funds, awareness of the value of women's archives and encourage more donations under their scheme. Women in Jazz have been successful in their recent funding bid, and the outcomes of this new

post will need to be assessed in order to establish any future developments. More accessible and suitable office and archive space would be beneficial for the material and potential users of the archive. The option of Swansea Women's Centre developing a national influence akin to Glasgow Women's Library is unlikely without considerable financial support and development. Before developments are made here, it may be prudent to undertake some user surveys to establish what women in the region want from the Centre and to develop new services that would match their needs. At present, their information collection is limited in scope and would need considerable investment in order to facilitate greater use.

7.8 Summary and Conclusions

The central aim of the thesis was to assess the potential for a women's library in Wales. Based on the research and investigation, it is my opinion that the creation of a physical women's library, in a single building in Wales, is not the most appropriate or practical option for Wales. Instead, the existing women's information organisations could be strengthened in terms of their funding, paid staff, resources etc, in order to facilitate their development. AMC\WAW could expand their distributed approach to incorporate the Irish virtual model, which was an early aim of the group. Swansea Women's Centre could be strengthened in terms of its service range, facilities and information collection in order to enhance its regional profile. Women in Jazz could also be developed in order to raise its profile within and outside Wales, based on its unique collection of material.

In addition to investigating the situation in Wales, the thesis also sought to explore related issues. These were:

- What are the roles and natures of current women's libraries in the British Isles?
- What is the place of women's libraries within feminism?
- What is the place of women's libraries within librarianship?

From the research, it can be seen that the roles and natures of current women's libraries in the British Isles are varied. I have identified three models of women's libraries, which are:

- archive-based research institutions
- socially-orientated community-based resource centres
- virtual archive collections

Together they serve researchers, academics, students, ethnic minority women, women's voluntary groups, women on lifelong learning courses, unemployed women, and so on. For the users who know about the women's libraries, they are inspiration places:

I first discovered the Fawcett Library when I was doing the research for my book, 'Women's London', in 1986. As with most people, it became an inspiration to me and provided much of the material for another book.... (Murphy, 2002, p. 170)

Yet, despite their unique collections, important archives and wealth of contemporary material, many of the women's libraries have low user numbers, have low profiles locally and nationally, and are frequently subject to financial problems.

In general, women's libraries appear to be relatively isolated within their own spheres, and, to some extent, each one sees itself as unique and quite different from any other women's library. Whilst it is true that they are all different, there are a number of similarities which serve to unite them. A more unified network of such organisations might be able to work collectively to raise their combined profiles and to decrease the isolation from the library and archive profession and the slight separation from the feminist movement. However, these two sectors need also to recognise the existence and value of such organisations if the isolation is to be decreased.

This thesis has found that the field of women's libraries and archives is relatively neglected in terms of research and literature, and has also highlighted potential avenues for further research. For example:

- mapping of women's resources and archives in Wales
- mapping of women's organisations in Wales and creation of a directory

- a survey of information needs of women in Wales – leading to improving services for women in public libraries, if necessary, and assessing the potential usage of a women's library/centre
- research into the actual use made of women's libraries in Britain – user needs analysis.

In conclusion, the potential for a women's library in terms of a physical building and a single collection is limited, given the existing circumstances in Wales, the current circumstances of similar organisations in England and Scotland, and given the resource implications. Instead, options could be developed whereby existing women's information organisations are strengthened, and networks of women's groups are improved. Enhancing information provision for women in the public libraries in Wales could also be beneficial, after conducting a large scale information needs survey to see what their information needs are and how best these could be met. There is also potential for development of women's archives at the National Library of Wales. In some countries women's archives have been established in the national library e.g. in Denmark (Holst, 2002, p. 489). However, given that findings from the literature of women's information needs indicate that women do not generally turn to libraries for information, but use informal networks and friends, other options may be more appropriate. Thus, improving the women's networks and strengthening the existing women's information and archive groups in Wales could be the optimal way to empower women in Wales and improve their social, cultural and economic lives.